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G R A C E.

VOL. I.

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G R A C E

A NOVEL

BY

HENRY TURNER

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

TINSLEY BROTHERS
CATHERINE STREET, STRAND
LONDON

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G R A C E.



CHAPTER I.

OLD KENSINGTON.

IT is a Providential order of things, that the majority of persons should regard their own peculiar locale as the one place wherein it is most desirable to dwell. We have known residents at Peckham who exalt the beauties of the Rye: at Canonbury who spoke of the 'High' as if they were denizens of Oxford City: of Hampstead who considered the view from the 'Spaniards' as surpass-

ing anything that Italy can show! But to the literary man and the artist, all these places are thrown into the shade by the charms of the 'Old Court Suburb.'

The Man of the Pen, as he strolls along the broad walk of Kensington Gardens, involuntarily, with his mental vision, peoples it with the beaux and belles—the fops and gallants of a century and a-half ago—beauty in powdered locks and patches, and rustling in brocade—cavaliers in red-heeled shoes, wearing steel swords, and expert

‘In the nice conduct of a clouded cane.’

The Man of the Pencil exults in the ‘delicious bits’—the splendid elms—the groves of chestnuts—the old red palace, which though of no special beauty in itself, forms so capital a contrast to the masses of green foliage, through which you get occasional peeps of the home of the Third William.

The High Street, irregular and quaint as

some old county town in the shires, leading to the gates of Holland Park—with its endless associations. From Addison, who here ‘married discord in a noble wife,’ to George, Prince of Wales, losing his heart to Lady Sarah Lennox as he gallops by to Windsor—posed as she was most opportunely and picturesquely as Phillis milking a cow in the gardens facing the road.

Adjoining the gates of Holland Park is a long row of substantial houses known as Phillimore Place—but which was christened by the Prince we have just named, from the sculptured tablet over each drawing-room window, by a far less euphonious title. Here resided Wilkie at the height of his fame, and here he spent the happiest evening of his life, when he received his mother and sister on their arrival from their humble abode in the north, and gave them a home amidst the opulence and gaiety of London. And here, which is more to our present

purpose, resided Mr. Beaumont and his two daughters. Mr. Beaumont being a widower—and by profession, a merchant in the city. Although by no means a rich man, Mr. Beaumont lived in very good style, entertained a considerable portion of literary and artistic Kensington at his hospitable table—and was believed to have provided very handsomely for his two daughters, in the event of his death or their marriage. But we will now, without more ado, introduce the reader to the domestic circle of the Beaumonts.

It was a cold frosty night in January, a fine sleet was falling, and the horses' hoofs rang out sharp and clear on the iron-bound earth, while the few pedestrians who were passing along the High Street hastened rapidly towards their several destinations. One of them, however, proceeded leisurely enough till he

arrived at Mr. Beaumont's door, and rang the bell for admittance.

Mr. Lawson was impervious to meteorological influences, and that being the case we will precede him and enter the dining-room, where Mr. Beaumont and his two daughters are sitting at dessert. *Places aux dames.* Grace is about twenty years of age, and the senior of her sister by two years. Diminutive in stature, almost *petite*, with dark hair and eyes, and pale, colourless complexion, she forms a striking contrast to her sister. Ethel is above the middle height, with light hair and blue eyes, in fact an exemplification of a perfect blonde. The most casual observer would detect at a glance that their mental characteristics were as diverse as their physical qualities. The keen intellectual expression which lighted up the features of Grace, the firm mouth, the thin nervous lips which quivered with every emotion, were all in

strong opposition to the type presented by her sister. The beauty of Ethel was of a more sensuous form. The peach-like bloom of the cheek, the voluptuous mouth, the under lip so full and pouting, 'as if some bee had stung it newly,' the long dark lashes shading the violet eyes, the gently undulating lines of the figure, which already betrayed a tendency to *embonpoint*, the hair of that natural golden tint which has so taxed the ingenuity of the perruquier to imitate—all were opposed to the personal traits of her sister. Even the hands of the sisters were characteristic of their several temperaments. Those of Grace were thin and almost transparent, while the hands of Ethel were plump and opaque, yet perfect in their modelling. The movements of the elder sister were quick and animated, those of the younger sister were slow and lethargic, and this difference extended even to their mental operations. The apprehension

of Grace being preternaturally sharp, while the perceptions of Ethel were so slow as to mislead the majority with respect to her mental power. Grace was outspoken and fearless in her speech, and frequently created enmity in consequence; while Ethel was never known to utter anything but amiable and honeyed sentiments, and seemed formed on the model of the lotus eaters of Tennyson.

Mr. Beaumont was a handsome man, about fifty years of age—of a stout portly figure, with keen, penetrating black eyes, and a ruddy complexion. The room was of an old-fashioned type. Dark crimson walls, large massive sideboard, bronze chandeliers in the form of a palm tree, and window curtains, voluminous and of a deep maroon colour.

With respect to the pictures, Mr. Beaumont was fond of relating the history of their acquisition. With a dislike to modern

examples of painting, and a disability of purchasing genuine specimens of the Old Masters: he consulted an eminent member of the Royal Academy, with whom he was on terms of intimacy. The modern Titian guaranteed, for a sum of fifty pounds, to cover the walls of Mr. Beaumont's dining-room with well executed *copies* of the Old Masters. Armed with this authority, and practically unlimited as to time, the R.A., attired in his oldest suit, a dilapidated wide-awake, worn in a slouching form over the eyes, and a short black pipe in his mouth, proceeded to explore the neighbourhood between Titchborne Street and Oxford Street. In three months he caused to be delivered at Mr. Beaumont's house admirably executed copies of some of the most celebrated works in the National Gallery. When the canvasses were unrolled, they showed the necessity of cleaning, but when that was accomplished, and they were suitably framed,

the guests of Mr. Beaumont were under the delusion that the large picture of Bacchus and Ariadne was a veritable Titian, till undeceived by their host—for it is needless to say, Mr. Beaumont had no intention of foisting an imposture on the credulity of his friends, and was quite ready to relate the story of the origin of the pictures when questioned on the subject.

He had a pre-occupied air this evening, and it was almost with a shade of testiness that he had spoken at dinner to his daughters, and inquired at what time the rehearsal was to take place. For the reader must be informed that some '*tableaux vivans*' were about to be given in the residence of Mr. Beaumont, to be followed by a dance, and this was the evening appointed for the first rehearsal.

'At eight o'clock,' replied Grace.

'And it is now half-past seven,' said Mr. Beaumont, with a sigh. 'I suppose you will not require my presence, at all

events, for an hour or so. I have some letters to write, and—'

'Not in the least, papa,' replied Grace ; 'but, of course, you will show yourself sometime during the evening.'

A loud ring interrupted the conversation, and in a few moments a smart parlour-maid announced that Mr. Lawson was in the drawing-room. The sisters again reminding Mr. Beaumont of his promise to witness some portion of the rehearsal, departed to receive their visitor.

Mr. Lawson rose as they entered, and in a most effusive manner, his face beaming with pleasure, shook hands warmly with both the sisters. Mr. Lawson was a tall, fair man, about thirty years of age, with aquiline features and light blue eyes. His face was clean shaven, and combined with his white tie he presented a decidedly clerical appearance, although by profession Mr. Lawson was a solicitor, with offices in the Temple.

The shallow-thinking portion of the community were charmed with his genial manner, his apparent interest in their concerns ; his soft voice, the warm, prolonged pressure of the hand (of the texture of satin), the nature that seemed to sympathise with 'every ill that flesh is heir to.' The more observant members of society entertained some doubt as to the genuineness of these outward signs, and among this class was Grace Beaumont. She was reported to have said that Mr. Lawson could cash a draft for either smiles or tears at sight. Ethel was among the believers who credited the sincerity of the voice broken with emotion, the tear which stood trembling on the eyelid, as some tale of woe or distress was related in his presence. He was also a favourite with Mr. Beaumont, who entrusted him with all his legal business. In soft and silvery tones Mr. Lawson began,—

‘I am rejoiced to find, my dear young ladies, that I am among the earliest of the corps dramatique invited here this evening. I only wish my poor services as prompter were of a more valuable description, and—’

‘Pray don’t apologise, Mr. Lawson,’ interrupted Grace. ‘At an amateur performance the prompter is generally the most important character in the *dramatis personæ*, although he is only heard, and not seen.’ Mr. Lawson smiled blandly. ‘But we shall require your services in some other capacity Mr. Lawson,’ pursued Grace. ‘We have decided to abandon the idea of a comedy, and have some *tableaux vivans* instead. Mr. Brown is of opinion that they will give more satisfaction, take up less time, and save an infinity of trouble, as there will be no study of words, merely a rehearsal of the poses.’

‘Mr. Brown!’ said Mr. Lawson; ‘I do not think I have ever met that gentleman.’

‘Not met Mr. Brown? or Mr. Algernon Brown, as he is usually called?’ said Grace, in tones of astonishment. ‘I thought everybody knew Algernon Brown!’

Mr. Lawson’s face was eloquently expressive of ignorance on the point.

‘Please touch the fire, Mr. Lawson, and I will indoctrinate you as to the kind of individual to whom I shall shortly have the pleasure of introducing you. Grace began,—

‘Algernon Brown is a *littérateur*, and his calls here are usually at mid-day, when you, Mr. Lawson, are, I presume, immersed in the study of Blackstone. He knows everything and everybody; can tell you the name of the forthcoming new comedy, how much the Laureate is to receive for his new poem, the date of the next royal marriage, and the name of the most probable winner of the Derby.’

‘Quite an Admirable Crichton,’ said Mr. Lawson, with the slightest perceptible sneer.

‘Then he is cosmopolitan in his tastes,’ continued Grace ; ‘and can sympathise with every class, from a petroleuse to a premier.’

‘A petroleuse ?’ interrupted Mr. Lawson.

‘Yes ; he says he generally finds that he works best surrounded by photos of the most celebrated female Communists. You will see him with his writing-desk covered with their portraits ; and he will show you Louise this, who fired the Tuilleries ; or Marguerite that, who destroyed the Foreign Office, with the same manner and tone that a parent uses when dilating on the pictorial charms of her offspring !’

‘Rather an objectionable person,’ replied Mr. Lawson, ‘is he not ?’

‘On the contrary,’ said Grace ; ‘he is universally popular ; and although he is really a strong Conservative and Monarchist, he is London correspondent for several pro-

vincial Radical papers, and is constantly harping on the advantages of a republic ; all of which tends to show his thorough impartiality, and his love for an independent and original standpoint.'

Mr. Lawson gazed hard and steadily at Grace as she uttered this speech ; but his keen glance could detect no lurking twinkle of the eye, or covert smile at the corners of the mouth, as she bent her looks in the direction of the fire.

Ethel, who was more accustomed to the bizarre style of her sister's conversation, quietly amused herself with languidly turning over Leech's illustrations to *Punch*, the red glow of the fire, as she lay ensconced in a luxurious fauteuil, lighting up her superb form in quite a Rembrandtesque manner.

Grace continued,—

' Mr. Brown is possessed of considerable industry and some acquirements, is a good linguist, and has had experiences of foreign

travel ; but there is one phrase which no one ever heard him pronounce—*Je ne sais pas*. Whether it is a quotation from Horace—a definition of an architectural term—the date of the birth of some heathen philosopher, or the root of a Greek verb—Mr. Brown is equally ready with a solution and a reply. That the answer is not always correct is immaterial, and more the fault of the questioner than of Mr. Brown. How can it be expected that “one small head could contain all he knew?” He is believed to devote a considerable portion of his time and literary earnings to the cause of charity, and as this good is done by stealth, and not paraded, it goes far in the estimation of his fellows to condone any self-sufficiency and vanity which otherwise might seem to mar his character. Mr. Gordon, our future P.R.A., you have, I think, met at some of our musical evenings?’

Mr. Lawson bowed in token of assent as

the servant announced ‘Mr. Algernon Brown and Mr. Gordon.’

‘Literature and Art,’ said Grace with a smile ;—‘appropriate combination.’





CHAPTER II.

THE REHEARSAL.



LITTLE, sallow, yellow man, apparently about forty years of age, with black hair and short black beard, and presenting very much the type of individual which one meets at a second-rate café on a Parisian boulevard—such was Algernon Brown. His companion possessed a slight, graceful figure, lithe and sinewy ; with handsome features, brown hair and moustache, and that penetrating glance of the eye so frequently seen in those whose mission in life it is to *observe*, ere they transfer to canvas or the page the objects before them.

Although barely three-and-twenty, Edwin

Gordon was already looked upon as the most probable successful candidate for the next vacancy among the ranks of the Associates of the Royal Academy.

After the usual salutations, Grace proceeded to introduce Brown to Mr. Lawson, who made a stiff bow in response, which was as coldly returned by the Man of the Pen. Brown produced a bundle of papers and sketches from his pocket, and was speedily engaged with Grace and the artist in arranging at a small table near the window the details of the *tableaux vivans*. Mr. Lawson drew a chair beside Ethel, and, with one of his usual stereotyped smiles, inquired if she felt most interested about the *tableaux* or the dance which was to follow.

‘I do not feel much excited about either event,’ replied Ethel. ‘The play was an immense demand upon my memory and my perseverance. I never knew before how indebted we are to the members of the

dramatic profession for devoting their existence to the amusement of our leisure hours. I had acquired the words certainly, but I am told there yet remained what is called stage business, but on that Mr. Brown was to have enlightened us ; and the dance involves a certain amount of physical exertion, especially now that the Polka is coming again into vogue.'

'I thought all young ladies were, what the newspapers term, votaries of Terpsichore,' said Mr. Lawson.

Grace here interposed. 'If we had *your* privilege of selecting our partners, Mr. Lawson, a dance would possess much greater attraction. You of the sterner sex can scarcely imagine the feeling of consternation which "comes o'er us like a summer cloud," as we perceive some well-intentioned but awkward and clumsy applicant for the vacant valse approach with an unmeaning simper, which gives no promise of com-

pensatory intelligence. What is a girl to do? She must either undergo a physical and mental penance of some ten minutes' duration, or decline valseing for the evening, with the additional chance of offending an otherwise worthy member of society.'

'Probably in a few years this condition of things may be all changed, Miss Beaumont. We are advancing with such "leaps and bounds" towards the emancipation of the gentler sex, that in a brief space they may not only acquire the privilege of choosing their partners for the dance, but the still more important one of selecting their partners for life.'

'And in that case,' said Brown, advancing from the recess near the window, 'we should behold Romeo and Juliet reversed, and rich widows of forty laying their hearts and fortunes at the feet of some coy solicitor from the Temple or Gray's Inn. But suppose we proceed to business. Mr.

Gordon and I propose that the *tableaux* should be selected exclusively from the works of Scott. We will commence with the "Talisman." Miss Beaumont will make a charming Edith, Miss Ethel a regal Berengaria, Mr. Gordon an artistic Sir Kenneth, and your humble servant the sallow and cadaverous Emir Saladin. Edwin has been good enough, as you will perceive, to make a considerable number of sketches, which will not only settle the question of poses, but also serve as a guide to the costumier. Some scenes from the "Pirate," with Edwin as the Pirate, and the young ladies here as Minna and Brenda, and so on.'

'Have you allotted any special character to me, Mr. Brown?' said Lawson in his most conciliatory tones.

'Were we including Shakespeare, I should suggest—"Malvolio," the cross-gartered Malvolio,' replied Brown; 'but

as it is, suppose you personate Gilbert Glossin—it is what actors call a character-sketch, and susceptible of an artistic make-up.’

‘Glossin,’ said Lawson musing—‘he was, I think, connected with the law. I should prefer some other character. In society it is generally found that gentlemen are content to leave their profession at home, and not talk “shop”—no matter whether they be lawyers, or manufacturers of smart paragraphs for the cheap daily press.’

‘Admirable!’ said Brown, seizing Lawson by the hand, and shaking it with great cordiality. ‘Your sentiments do you honour. Let us swear eternal friendship.’

Mr. Lawson hastened to withdraw his hand, his countenance wearing a very ominous expression as he did so; but any further *persiflage* was checked by Grace, who reminded her guests of the flight of time, and of the fact that only four days inter-

vened between the rehearsal and the performance, owing to the change of plans which had taken place.

Ere they could commence, Mr. Lawson expressed a wish to see Mr. Beaumont on a matter of business, and accordingly descended to the dining-room, where he found his friend sitting over the wine and walnuts.

Mr. Beaumont shook Lawson cordially by the hand, and motioned him to a seat.

‘Already tired of the play?’ said the host.

Mr. Lawson explained that his services were not likely to be in requisition for some time, and that he had availed himself of the opportunity to have a few minutes’ chat with his old friend, Mr. Beaumont, on some important and particular business. Mr. Beaumont pushed the bottle towards Lawson, poured out some claret for himself, folded his hands, and prepared to listen attentively to Lawson’s communica-

tion. But the lawyer did not appear equally ready to commence. He hesitated, cleared his throat, and exhibited various symptoms of embarrassment, all which were so foreign to his usual self-collected manner, that Mr. Beaumont was unable to avoid showing signs of surprise. At length Mr. Lawson began,—

‘I do not know, Mr. Beaumont, whether the proposal I am about to submit for your approval will be of a welcome character or not, but I may as well at once say that it has reference to your daughter, Miss Ethel.’

‘My daughter!’ said Mr. Beaumont, in astonished tones.

‘I wish to have your sanction to my union with Miss Ethel,’ continued Lawson; ‘presuming, of course, that I obtain the unbiassed consent of the young lady herself.’

As Mr. Beaumont made no reply, but

sat immersed in thought, and gazing intently at the damask table-cloth before him, Mr. Lawson proceeded, but in firmer tones, and with all his usual self-possession.

‘I need scarcely say that I shall consider myself one of the most fortunate of men, should I succeed in becoming the possessor of so much youth, beauty, and accomplishments. And it would be the study of my life to prove myself worthy of so great a prize.’

Mr. Lawson here raised his eyes, and directed a keen glance from under his pent-house brows at Mr. Beaumont, having up to this moment kept them modestly veiled from observation. His host, however, still remained deep in thought, so Lawson continued,—

‘It is unnecessary, I am convinced, for me to assure you of the purity and perfect unselfishness of my views; for though, as you are aware, I am far from being a rich

man, I am the reverse of mercenary in my nature and temperament.'

'Say no more, my dear Lawson, on that subject. The difficulty is simply this,—I fear you are a day after the fair. I am afraid young Gordon has forestalled you.'

'Forestalled me!' said Lawson.

'Yes. It was only yesterday I received a similar application from Edwin—that he might be permitted to pay his addresses to Ethel.'

'And what was your reply, sir, may I ask?' inquired Lawson.

'I offered no objection—none whatever. Young Gordon is, so far as I know, a very steady young fellow. He is a rising man, and very clever in his profession, as we *all* know. And I should never attempt to interfere with any choice either of my daughters might happen to make, provided, of course, that the husband selected was of good reputation and fair prospects.'

‘Do you know, Mr. Beaumont, whether Miss Ethel, herself, is inclined to favour the suit of Mr. Gordon?’

‘I haven’t the remotest idea. Girls are not in the habit of making confidants of their fathers on those questions. But come, Lawson, don’t look so cast down. We shall very soon know whether the citadel has surrendered; and if not, *you* can then lay siege in due form.’

‘Then *you* are equally disposed to favour my suit, should such be the case?’ inquired Lawson.

‘Most decidedly. I have every confidence in you, my dear Lawson, as you very well know. In fact, I don’t mind saying that I would prefer my son-in-law to be a member of your profession, rather than an artist; not in the least because I have any prejudice against painters of pictures, on the contrary; but I cannot shut my eyes to the fact, that Art is a

more precarious profession than Law ; and you are an older man, Edwin being still a boy, as one may say. But, as I said before, if my daughter had two suitors,—one with four thousand a year, and the other with a thousand, and both equally suitable in other respects, and she preferred the poorer of the two, I would not attempt to influence her choice one iota ! But suppose we adjourn to the regions above. I do not see how we can do any good by further talk at present.’

It was not without a jealous pang that Lawson entered the drawing-room, and perceived Gordon seated by Ethel, who was manipulating the lace edging of her handkerchief in an embarrassed manner, her countenance suffused with blushes, and the face of Edwin so close to her own that she could feel his warm breath upon her cheek. Lawson turned to Beaumont with a livid smile : ‘ The siege has begun.’

During the absence of Lawson from the drawing-room, the company had been increased by two additions—Mrs. Dawson and her daughter Caroline, or, as she was usually styled by her intimates, Carrie Dawson.

Mrs. Dawson's widowhood was of some years' growth; she was of a thin, spare habit of body; possessed of ample means, good-natured and amiable, but rather disposed to chatter about her friends and their doings—not from any malevolent nature, but more from a spirit of thoughtlessness and carelessness.

Caroline Dawson was so great a contrast to her mother, both in person and disposition, as to render it difficult of belief that they were in any way related. Fair, stout, and blooming, with very blue eyes, and hair so light in colour that it was termed auburn or red by friends or enemies respectively. Although you could scarcely deem it possible for any nature so free and joyous to incur enmity, yet the truth must

be spoken, and there were dispositions so filled with the gall of envy as to begrudge Carrie Dawson her complexion of milk and roses, her luxuriant natural curls falling in profusion on her neck and shoulders, her cheerful, happy disposition, and last, but not least, her money. For of this last commodity Miss Dawson had enough and to spare. Not only was she an only child, and as such, of course, inheritor of her mother's wealth, but she was also already possessed of considerable means, through the death of an uncle some years previously. Although nearly four-and-twenty, she had never had a lover, but was believed by her most intimate friends to be always more or less under the influence of a misplaced and unrequited attachment. Some doubt existed at the present time as to the object of her affection, but suspicion pointed to Mr. Algernon Brown. But he was most decidedly perfectly unconscious of his good fortune. His

predecessor was as unlike the worldly Algernon as could possibly be imagined, being a High Church curate at Bayswater.

Mr. Beaumont and Lawson shook hands with the new arrivals.

Mrs. Dawson began, 'We are so glad you have come, Mr. Beaumont, for we require your casting vote. Carrie is so anxious to personate Catherine in the novel of "The Abbot." You, of course, remember that charming scene where Roland Graeme is introduced to Catherine. But Mr. Brown objects to personating Roland. He declares he is too old. I am sure he would look the character admirably, with a suitable wig and so on. Do you think he is too old?'

'Too old!' said Beaumont; 'Algernon Brown is young enough for anything. He will never be old. Come, Algernon, I thought you were a perfect squire of dames, and could refuse a lady nothing. What have you to say for yourself?'

‘Say for myself?’ replied Brown; ‘nothing, but that I am prepared to do Miss Dawson’s bidding — “pluck bright honour from the palefac’d moon”; descend into the arena and rescue her glove from the fangs of the lion (like the gentleman in the story). But, ah! Miss Dawson, ask me not to make myself ridiculous by assuming the bashfulness of the youthful Roland! No; if Miss Dawson is so partial to the “Abbot,” let me prevail on her to become one of the four Maries; with Miss Beaumont as the dark beauty, Miss Ethel and Miss Dawson as the fairer contrast, and Miss Campbell as the neutral tint; this group will be the chief success of the evening.’

‘As you please, Mr. Brown,’ said Carrie Dawson, laughing, as she sat down by the side of Grace, on an ottoman in the centre of the room.

‘I hope you don’t know the sequel of that story alluded to by Mr. Brown,’ said Grace.

‘What story?’ inquired Carrie.

‘That of the “Lover and the Lion.”’

‘No; pray tell it to me!’

‘That I am sure I shall not,’ said Grace; ‘if you don’t know it,—“Where ignorance is bliss—”’

‘O Grace! I know I am not so clever as you, but—’

‘My dear child, I am only quoting from Gray.’

Grace usually, but unconsciously, treated Miss Dawson as her junior, although she was her senior by four years.

‘Come, Carrie, tell me, dear; we are old friends, and have no secrets from each other. Do you love Algernon Brown? There, you need not answer. That red signal is sufficient.’

Carrie Dawson veiled her blue eyes as she slowly replied,—

‘I think Mr. Brown the most delightful person I ever saw; so clever—so amusing—

quite like one of those characters in Bulwer's novels.'

'And how long is this new passion destined to last?'

'I have not said I loved him.'

'No; you have not *said* so, but—'

'Come, Grace,' interrupted Carrie, 'let *me* catechise for once. Do you love Edwin Gordon?'

Miss Dawson had taken Grace's hand within her own, and bent her large eyes on the face of her companion, whose cheeks suddenly flamed up like an eastern sky at sunrise.

Grace hurriedly withdrew her hand, whispered, 'Here is your mamma,' and crossed over to where Mr. Beaumont was chatting with Brown; meanwhile Edwin still sat talking with Ethel, while Lawson stood leaning on the chimney-piece, and glowering from under his shaggy eyebrows, answering Mrs. Dawson *mal-à-propos* in response to a

long and uninteresting story about some people he had never seen.

And was the talk of Ethel and Edwin about love? Not so. He was describing, with all the enthusiasm of youth, the wonders of Rome and the beauties of Capri, of which he had been a witness during the previous autumn. When Mr. Beaumont and Lawson entered the room, he had been descanting on the harmony of colours, and had increased the bloom on the cheek of Ethel by playfully recommending special tints as suitable for her particular complexion, especially with reference to her costume at the approaching dance.

‘How fortunate you are to be able to follow a profession you appear to love so much,’ said Ethel. ‘I suppose you would rather be a poor artist than a rich merchant!’

‘Infinitely,’ replied Gordon. ‘If wealth comes as the result of our labours—’tis well; good in itself, and as showing the appreciation of our fellows; but an artist who com-

menced his career as a money speculation, is no more deserving of the title than a poet who would cultivate *his* art from similar motives.'

'And yet I have heard of poets making very good bargains of their wares,' said Ethel, slyly. 'And are there not such things as "pot-boilers" in the artist world?'

'Unfortunately,—yes. The compulsory pictures by men who have not followed the advice of the great Sir Joshua, and made Art their sole mistress, but have entered the bonds of matrimony and given hostages to fortune before they have a balance at their bankers, or indeed any banker at all!'

An observation, pertinent to this speech of Gordon's, rose naturally to the lips of Ethel, but was dismissed as soon as considered. 'Would Edwin Gordon always follow the counsel of the first president of the Academy?'—was the thought which passed through her mind. The next moment they were both summoned to assist the com-

position of a group, under the special direction of Algernon Brown. This completed the rehearsal, and Brown and Gordon having expressed their entire approval, and prophesied a great success on the following Friday, adieux were exchanged, osculatory and otherwise, and the company departed for their several homes,—Mr. Brown escorting the Dawsons to their house in Campden Hill, to the intense delight of the younger lady, who began to think her personal and mental qualities were at length on the eve of being appreciated at their proper value. Long after the departure of the guests, Grace sat in her bedroom, her cheek resting on her hand, listening to the regular, peaceful slumber of her sister.

Half aloud she murmured, as her thoughts reverted to Miss Dawson, ‘I will never pretend to read character again. ‘That flaxen-haired nonentity knows me better than I know myself!’



CHAPTER III.

ANTE CŒNAM.

THE important evening at length arrived. The guests had been specially requested to be in their places at eight, at which time the *tableaux* were positively to commence.

Long before that hour, the characters for the first series of *tableaux*, consisting of scenes from the 'Talisman,' were costumed, made up, and waiting in their several dressing-rooms, in a greater or less state of perturbation, and for the bell which was to ring in the overture to 'Fra Diavolo,' to be played on the piano by the two pretty Misses Campbell. It fell to the lot of Mr. Beaumont to receive the guests as they

arrived, as both his daughters were invisible in their several characters of Edith and Berengaria.

Among the earliest arrivals were Mrs. Dawson and Carrie. The latter was simply attired in white muslin, looped up with forget-me-nots, and looked the picture of good health and good temper. Her personation of one of the four Maries was to be the last in the programme, and therefore at present Miss Dawson constituted one of the audience. Mr. Beaumont did the introductions, which included several sprigs of the Civil Service, and specimens of city men—whom he had endeavoured to assimilate. The men of the East found the *argôt* they were in the daily habit of employing was an unknown tongue to their brethren of the West, and therefore they remained in two distinct clusters, criticising the company and the arrangements.

‘I say, Jones, when will these *tableaux*

be over ?' said Mr. Cooper, a little red-haired man from Mincing Lane.

'I expect they will be precious slow—no dialogue, they tell me. I would much rather have come a couple of hours later, in time for the hop, but old B— stuck out so for putting in an early appearance, that I couldn't back out very well.'

'What is this "Talisman" about ?'

'Blessed if I know,' said Jones, a fat wharfinger, who lived at the rate of four thousand a-year, at Balham. 'I only read novels of real life, something spicy and sensational, when I *do* read; which isn't often, as *you* know, Fred. I say, that is a crummy piece of goods in the white dress and blue flowers. Who is she ?'

'That ?' replied Mr. Frederick Cooper ; 'that is a Miss Dawson—only child—lots of tin ; but, I expect, tied up rather. The old gal looks a she-dragon ; however, I'll

have a go in at a waltz with the young one. Let me see ; that is the second dance.'

Mr. Cooper inspected the programme ; but ultimately decided to wait till the *tableaux* were over before honouring Miss Dawson with his society.

' Oh, I say, Jones,' whispered Mr. Cooper, ' can you let me have a couple of thou. till the next account, at the usual ? I may not have time to call in the morning at the wharf.'

' Double, if you like,' replied the wharf-inger.'

The bell now rang for the overture, and Miss Campbell and her sister Minnie duly installed themselves at the piano. The room had become very full, and the company at once seized the opportunity of a little music to enter upon a vigorous talk upon the various topics of the day.

Leaning against the marble chimney-piece

was Mr. Cecil Tudor, of the Schedule Office. Mr. Tudor was about seven-and-twenty years of age, of a tall, graceful carriage and bearing, decidedly good-looking, and in the receipt of the munificent salary of £120 per annum. He had entered the Civil Service three years previously, and might hope, with good conduct and good luck, to rise to about £400 a-year in the course of a quarter of a century, or so. Fortunately he had a small private income, which enabled him to belong to two West-end clubs, and rent a small bedroom in Bury Street, St. James. He was the son of a general officer, had been educated at Eton and Cambridge (of which he was B.A.), and could claim descent from that Henry Tudor, whom we have all seen slay in single combat King Richard III., in the play of that name.

‘Charming story the “Talisman,”’ lisped Mr. Tudor. ‘I declare I almost share the

enthusiasm of poor Thackeray, who was old enough to remember some of the Waverleys coming out, and say there is nothing like Scott after all! The *tableaux* ought to be good, with young Gordon as director. By-the-bye, Seymour, have you a tenner till the 26th? I have overdrawn my banking account.'

'So have I,' said Seymour, laughing. 'But really, Tudor, I am not trying Robertsonian repartee. It is the literal fact, I assure you. I have been very unlucky both at pool and whist lately.'

The descendant of Henry VII. was spared a reply, as the curtains were drawn aside, disclosing Brown and Gordon as the Emir and Sir Kenneth. Loud applause from the audience. A small canvas had been painted by Gordon as a background, representing the desert, and the poses were copied from the well-known vignette by Allan. Both maintained their positions ad-

mirably during the performance of some appropriate music, and the satisfaction of the spectators was complete.

‘How handsome he looks!’ said Mrs. Dawson.

‘He does indeed,’ sighed her daughter.

‘The chain armour becomes him so well,’ said Mrs. Dawson.

‘Chain armour!’ replied Miss Dawson; ‘I thought you were alluding to Mr. Brown!’

‘Oh no, my dear. Algernon Brown is very clever, and all that; but I should not compare him in point of looks to Mr. Gordon. Do you see that elegant young man near the chimney-piece, that is Mr. Tudor; belongs to a very good family, but poor as a church mouse; only a clerk in a Government office, my dear, so beware. That fair young man, yonder, is Mr. Cooper, one of our most rising men in the commercial world. I hope you will dance

with him, Carrie ; money is money now-a-days, and though you have plenty, I do not see why your poor uncle's hard earnings should go to keep in idleness some young scion of the aristocracy.'

'Ah ! here is Mr. Lawson ; how do you do ? I thought you were to figure in some of the *tableaux* ?'

'No, Mrs. Dawson. The company suffered from an *embarras de richesse*. With the talent of Mr. Brown, and the good looks of Mr. Gordon, aided by the graces of the female *corps dramatique*—a charming member of which body I see before me—no place could be found for *me* ; but, as the French say, I am here to *assist* at the representations.'

Mr. Lawson spoke this in so pathetic a tone that a stranger would have imagined he was under the influence of some great calamity.

We do not propose to describe in detail

the several *tableaux* represented on the occasion. Suffice it to say that the ladies carried off the palm (as they usually do—bless them!), and the audience scarcely knew which to admire the most—the *petite* elegance of Grace, or the imposing magnificence of Ethel, in their different characters.

The climax of enthusiasm was reached when the final *tableau* was represented—‘The Four Maries’—consisting of Grace and Ethel, Carrie Dawson, and pretty Miss Campbell. Their four styles of beauty were so admirably contrasted, that the result was pronounced to be perfect. The curtains fell under a tempest of applause, and then the usual Babel of sounds ensued, as each guest waxed eloquent over the special merits of the players.

This was intensified when Grace made her appearance attired for the dance which was to follow. Her usually colourless cheek was flushed with excitement and the triumph

which had been achieved, and her elegant figure showed to advantage in a yellow grenadine, festooned with wild roses. Congratulations of all kinds were showered upon her, of that enthusiastic description of which amateurs are generally the recipients, and which has the natural effect of causing them to consider themselves neglected Kembles and embryo Keans, born to wither in obscurity. But Grace waived the flatterers aside, with a merry laugh—

‘Nay, friends, nay. Honour to whom honour is due. Here come the heroes of the fray, Messrs. Gordon and Brown.’

Those gentlemen, who now appeared in nineteenth-century costume, also modestly disclaimed any especial merit, and the controversy was ended by the prelude to the quadrille, played on the piano by the Campbells, and in the composition of which dance very little time was lost.

The dance had already commenced, when

Ethel sailed into the room, presenting a magnificent spectacle of youth and loveliness. Clad in light blue silk, which harmonised exquisitely with her fair complexion, a single camellia in her brilliant tresses, she quite deserved the quotation which Brown applied admiringly to her, in an aside to Gordon,—

‘She moves a goddess, and she looks a queen.’

Mr. Lawson appeared to join in the general admiration which the beauty of Ethel had created, and took advantage of a vacant chair to seat himself by her side. He had determined not to let the evening pass without broaching the subject which occupied his whole thoughts ; and although it would seem almost absurdly premature even to hint at such a topic as a life engagement at this early period of the evening, he resolved to be guided by circumstances, and not to risk the destruction of his dearest hopes by any unnecessary and dangerous delay.

In his most winning and silver tones, he uttered a few common-places as to the result of the *tableaux* in general, and her own admirable personations in particular.

The music of the final figure of the quadrille was being played, and the succeeding dance was to be a valse.

‘I think, Miss Ethel, you do not valse? I thought not. Have you any objection to our taking our places in the conservatory? We shall have a better view of the dancers, and leave them a clearer field; and I think, my dear Miss Ethel, you will find the temperature more agreeable than in this heated room.’

Ethel rose, and languidly placing her hand within his arm, suffered Lawson to lead her to the conservatory at the end of the drawing-room. Here, ensconced beneath the shade of a tall palm-tree, they could see the whole of the ballroom, and were themselves, to a certain extent, concealed.

As he watched the handsome figure of Gordon whirling round the room, with Grace as his partner, he remembered the words of Mr. Beaumont concerning the passion entertained by the young painter for the lovely girl at his side; and as his eye fell on her superb beauty, and the thought would obtrude that even *now* he might be too late—that even *now* he might be gazing on the affianced wife of Gordon—he resolved, *coûte que coûte*, to settle the question at once and for ever.

‘My dear Miss Ethel, you will, I trust, pardon me if I confess that I had an additional reason for suggesting the conservatory as our watch-tower, other than your comfort and convenience.’

Ethel turned her violet eyes upon him with an inquiring and wondering glance.

Lawson proceeded. ‘You must also pardon me if I appear abrupt in the communication I am about to make, but in a few

moments you will be surrounded by applicants for your hand in the dance. Miss Ethel—may I say Ethel, dear Ethel?—your charms of mind and person have made an impression on my heart which can never be effaced. I have the sanction and warm approval of Mr. Beaumont in my present appeal. May I hope? Are your affections disengaged?’

Lawson gently took her hand within his own, and looked with searching glance into the recesses of those violet eyes, which were now cast down and almost concealed by the long dark lashes which o’ershadowed them, her cheek rivalling the camellias which grew around. Ethel allowed her hand to remain quite passive, and it was with a feeling akin to ecstasy that Lawson imagined he felt the slightest possible pressure from the lovely fingers within his grasp as she rose and entreated him to return to the ballroom. Again Lawson

renewed his suit, till at length Ethel murmured forth the words—‘Oh! yes, yes!—no!—what am I saying?—let us speak of this another time. Come, let us return; our absence will be noticed.’

With a sensation of victory, of triumph almost, Lawson proceeded to escort her to the ballroom; and he could scarce refrain from a feeling of pity for his rival as he pictured to himself the very different reception which Gordon was doomed to encounter whenever he should declare his passion for the lovely Ethel.

They found Miss Dawson consulting her programme with an air of embarrassment, Mr. Jones standing anxiously by, and Algernon Brown holding her fan, the while he watched the commencement of the valse.

Turning to Brown, Miss Dawson blushing inquired, ‘Am I not engaged to you, Mr. Brown? This looks like a B!’

‘I fear not, Miss Dawson. Mr. Jones, I think, has a vested interest in this dance.’

With an air of disappointment, Carrie resigned herself to her fate and the aspiring and perspiring wharfinger.

Brown turned to Gordon. ‘See, Edwin, our friend Lawson is scarcely recognisable. “An unaccustomed joy lifts him above the ground with cheerful thoughts,” like Romeo, Act V., scene 1. He has all the appearance of a successful wooer, and the fair Ethel looks troubled—can his thoughts tend *that* way? Heaven forbid!’

Brown stood watching the pair as they mingled in the throng, with an excitement altogether unusual with him, so that he did not miss Gordon, who, a prey to the worst suspicions, had sought refuge in the small anteroom, where a neat-handed Phillis presided at the table devoted to refreshments.

Hastily pouring out some brandy into a tumbler, he drank it off at a draught, regard-

less of the astonished looks of the servant. How long he sat there he knew not. Oblivious of the stream of heated dancers which constantly poured into the room, he sat revolving the probabilities of Lawson having preceded him in the wooing of Ethel, and with a fortunate result !

At length the voice of Grace fell upon his ear, soft and gentle, as was her wont whenever she addressed those whom Ethel called her favourites. Far different from the defiant tone adopted towards Lawson—or even Algernon Brown, when in one of her combative moods.

‘Studying the composition of your next picture, Mr. Gordon ?’

‘Alas ! no, Miss Beaumont ; I am not so profitably employed. I fear I was musing on the familiar text, *vanitas vanitatum !*’

‘Indeed, Mr. Gordon, I am sorry our poor efforts to amuse you—’

Gordon sprang to his feet. ‘Ten thou-

sand pardons, Miss Beaumont; I scarcely know what I am saying. I have a private source of anxiety just now, to which I foolishly gave way. Are you engaged for the next dance?’

‘I fancy this is the conclusion of the first part,’ said Grace, ‘and that the next event on the programme is the important one of supper.’

‘Better still; we can have a longer chat than during the pauses of a dance, Miss Beaumont—may I say—Grace?’

‘At supper? Yes; you may, Mr. Gordon, if you particularly wish it.’

Edwin laughed one of his usual bright laughs, and led her towards the supper-room.





CHAPTER IV.

POST CŒNAM!

HAIL to thee, champagne! wondrous are thy powers! Loosing the tongues of the silent; giving courage to the diffident, and causing the pent-up witticisms to bubble forth as bright and sparkling as thy own glorious vintage! The supper at Mr. Beaumont's was very like other similar feasts. There was a great deal of crowding (which nobody seemed to mind); a great clatter of knives and plates; a great deal of laughing—from the loud guffaw of Jones & Co. to the musical ripple of the Kensington *belles*; a great deal of talking, which must have been of the wittiest, to judge by the laughter evoked thereby, did

we not remember Shakespeare's solution of 'a joke's prosperity ;' a great deal of popping of corks from the bottles containing thy excellent concoction, Messrs. Pommeroy & Greno ; and, best of all, very little speechifying.

Lawson sat by Ethel, his features beaming with amiability and satisfaction ; the almost sinister look of his cold, blue eyes, which generally peeped furtively from beneath the pent-house brows, being completely absent on this occasion.

Grace chatted gaily to Edwin Gordon, and apparently was unconscious of the wondering attention of her partner—who had eyes and ears for one object only—the fair Ethel !

The Dawson had succeeded by a considerable amount of strategy in securing Algernon Brown as her escort to the supper-room, and she certainly had no reason to complain of want of attention on the part of her cavalier. Piling up her plate with the most *recherché* of the comestibles, in spite of

her laughing protests, Brown contented himself with a biscuit and soda-water, to the intense astonishment of his companion. Miss Dawson occasionally came out with a remark or an allusion, which showed that she was not devoid of observation, and not entirely destitute of memory and information on other topics than novels and dress.

‘Is that all the supper you intend making, Mr. Brown? Oh! I know why you only take a biscuit and soda-water.’

Algernon turned an inquiring look upon his questioner.

‘I have read that Lord Byron used to do precisely the same thing—to make the ladies talk about him when they got home—but they did not see him devouring steaks and drinking porter at some tavern in Drury Lane the same night, when they were perhaps dreaming of his handsome face and his modest supper. Are *you* going to write any poetry to-night, Mr. Brown?’

‘I am not so gifted, Miss Dawson. I *have* some writing to do before morning, but it is what is called “a leader”—that is, an account of a great debate which is going on at this moment in the House of Commons, and which will, I hope, be in type and on your breakfast-table to-morrow, or, I should say, this morning, when you descend to partake of that matutinal meal.’

The admiration of Miss Dawson for the mental powers of Mr. Brown was increased, if possible, by this communication, and she allowed him to refill her glass with champagne without further protest. Meanwhile the music of the opening valse began to echo from the ballroom, and this had speedily the effect of clearing the supper-room. Gordon watched his opportunity, and taking advantage of Ethel’s abstention from the valse, found himself by her side, and in a low voice inquired if the Knight of the Leopard might crave audience with

Queen Berengaria. A flush of crimson suffused the face and neck of Ethel as she remembered the result of an interview which she had already held that evening in the conservatory.

‘Audience? Sir Kenneth,’ replied Ethel, with a smile, ‘and where in this crowded room can we grant an audience?’

Gordon made no response, but giving her his arm, led Ethel to the conservatory. Again Ethel found herself seated on the same chair, and her feelings instinctively told her that a somewhat similar declaration was about to be uttered. Gordon did not leave Ethel long in doubt, and the first sentence confirmed her suspicions.

‘I fear what I am about to say to you, Ethel, will come too late, but, nevertheless, the speech must be spoken. I have asked you to grant me this brief audience, upon the result of which hangs my whole future—to know if you will be my wife, for you

must have seen, dear Ethel, that I love you, that—but speak, Ethel, am I too late?’

Ethel answered not, but the hand which Gordon held trembled like the aspen; her cheek became alternately like the lily and the rose, and her agitation was evidently of so painful a character that Edwin momentarily forgot his own suffering, and drawing her towards him, murmured gently—‘Come, tell me, darling, is your heart free? is this dear hand your own to give?’ Still Ethel answered not. ‘Have you promised? if so, tell me at once, in mercy’s sake.’

Ethel bowed her head.

‘To Lawson?’

‘I must not say; it would not be right,’ at length came from the lips of Ethel. ‘I have not promised, but I have not refused him.’

‘Then it is Lawson who has anticipated me, who has spoken to you this night. I saw him lead you towards the conserva-

tory. And can you love this man, this Maw-worm, who carries deceit and hypocrisy in every line of his face, or I know nothing of physiognomy?’

‘Mr. Gordon,’ said Ethel, rising from her seat, ‘you are speaking of one of papa’s oldest friends, one in whom he has every confidence, and one whom *you* believe is my accepted husband, although *I* have not told you so.’

‘Forgive me, Ethel, but my disappointment is greater than I can bear. Were it anyone but Lawson—but come, I will lead you to the ballroom, and endeavour to forget all my dreams—dreams, alas! of happiness never to be realised.’

He raised the hand of Ethel to his lips, and had scarcely done so when Brown appeared, and claimed Ethel for his partner in the ‘Lancers’. Ethel smiled brightly upon Edwin, in token of forgiveness, and left the conservatory on the arm of Brown, grateful

to him as the unconscious cause of the termination of a very awkward and painful interview. Gordon watched her graceful figure disappear in the crowd of dancers, and in a few minutes was breathing the cold frosty air of a January moonlight night. Meanwhile, amid all that giddy throng there was not one who missed the handsome painter. Yes, there was one who, even if she had not *seen* the departure of Edwin Gordon, would have *felt* a difference, a change in the room and its surroundings when bereft of his presence. Henceforth the music had no melody, the gay throng of dancers only gave the idea of a jumping and perspiring crowd, impervious to collisions and callous to obstructions. Mrs. Dawson was seated near a congenial spirit, in the shape of an old dowager, watching with some slight feelings of dismay the progress which Mr. Cecil Tudor was making in the good graces of her daughter, for Mr.

Algernon Brown was hard at work by this time at his leader on that night's debate in the vicinity of one of the newspaper offices.

‘Yes, they do say, Mrs. Jackson, that Mr. Lawson is not so sanctimonious as he pretends to be—far from it; that he is a turf man—owns race horses (of course he does not run them in his own name); and I do think, except a racing parson, there is nothing so bad as a racing lawyer. I would never trust him with any of *my* business. I am only surprised that Mr. Beaumont does; but he thinks there is no one like Mr. Lawson. I wish Carrie would not dance so much with that Mr. Tudor. He is as poor as a church mouse. It is always the way, Mrs. Jackson; these detrimentals are always *so* amusing, and *vice versa*. I suppose it is a very proper arrangement, in the same way as heiresses are usually plain.’

Meanwhile Carrie Dawson—like an unconscious philosopher as she was—was, in the

absence of the delightful Algernon, making the best of Cecil Tudor—at one moment amusing him with her *insouciance*, and at another with her imprudent candour,—for reticence was not in the vocabulary of Miss Dawson.

‘You are in the Civil Service, I think, Mr. Tudor, are you not?’

‘I have that honour,’ replied Mr. Tudor.

‘Nothing to do, everyone tells me,’ said Carrie, ‘and the salary on a par with the work.’

‘We are libelled, I assure you, Miss Dawson—that is, so far as work is concerned.’

‘If I were a man,’ continued Carrie, ‘I would rather be a lawyer like Mr. Lawson, or a painter like Mr. Gordon, with all the uncertainty and risk.’

‘Gordon is a good name,’ replied Mr. Tudor, ‘otherwise I should remind you of the old saying, *noblesse oblige*.’

‘Oh! yes, to be sure, I forgot your royal

ancestry. The quadrille is waiting Mr. Tudor,' and away whirled Miss Dawson, with Mr. Tudor as her pioneer, through the last figure.

But everything comes to an end, and there were signs that the Beaumont party was among the number. The guests were rapidly thinning, and Ethel seized the opportunity of Lawson lingering to speak a few farewell words of parting.

'I must ask you, Mr. Lawson, to consider whatever I said in the conservatory as unsaid, although I scarcely remember what these words were; I was so unprepared for anything of the kind.'

'And am I to be thus bereft of all hope?' interrupted Lawson.

'I do not say that, Mr. Lawson. You are quite at liberty to renew the subject at a more fitting opportunity; but I do not wish you to leave to-night under a false impression. It would not be right.'

Ethel smiled as graciously as it was possible to smile, and Mr. Lawson, with a rueful expression of countenance, was fain to take his departure.

In less than ten minutes from that event Ethel was in the enjoyment of the inexpressible felicity of sitting in her bedroom, ensconced in an armchair, and enrobed in dressing-gown and fur slippers, which rested on the fender, in front of a cheerful fire—her long golden hair flowing over her shoulders in all its native magnificence. Her hands were clasped behind her head, and as she thus sat with her eyes half closed, musing on the events of the evening, a smile of placid enjoyment flickered across her beautiful features. Grace was seated at the glass, engaged in the important operation of hair-dressing. Ethel broke the silence.

‘ Grace, dear, I have some wonderful news for you.’

When such a phrase as this comes from

the lips of one sister to the ears of another, and both those sisters are young and pretty, it is only susceptible of one explanation. Apparently Grace entertained a similar opinion. The hair-dressing was abandoned, and she was kneeling at the feet of Ethel, with her chin leaning on her hands, and her dark eyes fixed earnestly upon her sister's face.

‘Guess, darling, what has happened?’

Grace made no reply.

‘I have had a proposal of marriage from Mr. Lawson!’

A crimson flush passed across the face of her sister, and she uttered a deep sigh of relief.

‘And you have accepted him?’

‘Well, really, Grace, I scarcely know what I said, I was so taken by surprise; but I behaved very honestly, at all events, and told him before leaving that he was not to consider I was engaged to him.’

‘And do you love him?’ inquired Grace.

‘That, also, I cannot tell you,’ replied Ethel, smiling. ‘At this moment I feel as if I should not break my heart if I never saw him again. But while I am in his presence I feel as if there were no being in the whole world with whom I would sooner pass my existence. The very sound of his voice is music; and while he is speaking he exercises a fascination over my senses, that I almost believe in all that papa says about odic force; but then papa has such strange notions about everything unconnected with his business. I trust I do not inherit any of them. And now, Grace, I am coming to the most wonderful part of my revelations—Edwin Gordon has also proposed!’

This time it was no crimson flush which lit up the features of Grace. An unearthly pallor caused them to resemble more the lineaments of a statue than those of a human being.

‘And you have refused HIM?’ came at length from the white lips of Grace.

‘I have. Grace, you are ill!’

Ethel touched the bell as she spoke, and her maid appeared.

‘Quick! Jenny, some water; my sister has fainted!’





CHAPTER V.

THE TEMPLE.

IT is not sufficiently borne in mind by the community that we all possess a dual character. We do not mean that mixture of good and evil which, from time immemorial, has been pointed out by poets and romancers as forming the component parts of human nature. But that occasionally we are startled by witnessing some course of action on the part of those with whom we are acquainted, which seems totally inconsistent with our experience of their lives and characters. The brilliant septuagenarian leader of a political party, who is supposed by the superficial to be a concrete mass

of cold officialism, devoid of sympathy or enthusiasm, is really the possessor of a larger amount of romance than ever fell to the lot of a girl looking forward to her first ball, with her head full of novels and plans of conquest.

What can be more pathetic in the perusal than the private diary of Theodore Hook? the *bon-vivant*, the *diner-out*, the apparently heartless man of the world? All this has reference to our friend Mr. Beaumont. He was known to his city friends as a good man of business, shrewd, clear-headed and practical, and remarkable for his strong common sense. A specimen of a large class with which our metropolis abounds, and which has rendered the title of 'British merchant' typical all over the world. That he was known by his more intimate friends to be an ardent student of astronomy, and was frequently in the habit of spending a great part of the night in his observatory

on the roof of his house at Kensington surprised no one.

We have eminent judges and surgeons who are disciples of painting, not only as an amusement and a relief to their severer studies, but who are so successful in the art as to be able to compete with professional brethren of the brush. But few of Mr. Beaumont's friends were aware that he believed in the principles of *astrology*.

On the two occasions when his daughters had bantered him on the subject, he had received their remarks in so serious a spirit that they had forbore from that date to jest with him upon the topic. Suffering, as he did occasionally, from insomnia, partly caused by anxiety respecting his city speculations, it was considered almost fortunate that he had a pursuit which served to engross his thoughts in those hours when he would otherwise have been a prey to city cares.

It was two days after the party, and Mr. Beaumont was closeted with Mr. Lawson in his private room at his chambers in the Temple. The interview had been a long one, and at the moment we are permitted to view the scene, Mr. Lawson was turning the key of his iron safe, and Mr. Beaumont carefully placing a written document in his pocket-book.

‘I think that matter is arranged to our mutual satisfaction,’ said Lawson.

‘Perfectly,’ replied Beaumont. ‘And now, how goes the wooing?’

Lawson shook his head in a lugubrious fashion.

‘Remember,’ said Beaumont, ‘faint heart ne’er won fair lady yet. I have not seen Edwin since the dance the other evening, so have no news of his success or failure; but as he is not a man to allow the grass to grow under his feet, we shall very soon learn results. But come, it is now five

o'clock. I have promised to be home to a six-o'clock dinner. I will take the train from the Temple.'

'I am going to Bayswater,' said Lawson, 'and will accompany you.'

So saying the two gentlemen rose, and, putting on their overcoats, left the room. As they passed through the outer office, Mr. Lawson spoke to his clerk.

'Oh, Simpson, I should like that indenture copied before you leave this evening.'

'I shall have it done in half-an-hour, sir,' replied the clerk.

'Very good; as soon as you have it finished you may go. It seems a very foggy night, Simpson.'

'Very foggy indeed, sir. You cannot see a yard before you.'

'Good night, Simpson.'

'Good night, sir.'

Both the gentlemen having left, Simpson proceeded with his copying in a very sedu-

lous manner, although half inclined to 'shut up shop,' as he called it, and finish the copying in the morning; but on consideration he decided to complete the task, as the state of the weather offered no inducement for an evening stroll along the embankment.

Ten minutes had probably elapsed, when a hurried step was heard ascending the stairs, and Mr. Lawson burst into the office. Passing rapidly into his private room, he almost as speedily returned, observing that Mr. Beaumont had missed his pocket-book after leaving the office, and had thought it possible he might have left it on the table, and so he, Mr. Lawson, had volunteered to return for it, and meet Mr. Beaumont at the Temple station.

'But,' said Mr. Lawson, 'he must have it with him, as I cannot find it on the table. Good night, Simpson.'

'Honesty is the best policy,' sententiously

.

observed Simpson. 'Had I skedaddled immediately the gov'nor left, I should have been bowled out, and there would have been a jolly row to-morrow morning.'

In this self-approving frame of mind, Mr. Simpson proceeded with the copying of the indenture.

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Grace and Ethel dined alone that evening. They had waited dinner till seven o'clock, and then assuming that Mr. Beaumont had been detained on urgent business, had rung and ordered dinner to be served.

Neither of the sisters spoke much at the evening meal. Ethel had a preoccupied air. The events of the last few days, the two declarations of love on the part of Gordon and Lawson, furnished ample matter for reflection.

Grace was under the influence of a depressed condition of thought, her mind filled with a sense of approaching evil and

gloomy foreboding, from which she in vain endeavoured to arouse herself.

The hours flew swiftly by, and ten had chimed from the timepiece on the mantel shelf, and still Mr Beaumont came not! As the last stroke sounded, Grace rose from her seat and declared she could bear this suspense no longer.

‘But what can we do, dear?’ said Ethel. ‘Papa may have gone home to dinner with a friend.’

‘If he had,’ replied Grace, he would have found some means of notifying the fact to us?’

‘The messenger may have neglected his duty, suggested Ethel.’

Grace paused deep in thought, her face wearing an expression of settled resolve, as she slowly spoke the words,—

‘You know me too well, Ethel, to suspect me of superstition—of idle dreams, but I cannot divest myself of a presentiment that

all is not well with papa, and I must go forth at once and settle these doubts one way or another.'

Ethel watched, with pale and trembling lips, the countenance of her sister, and could not avoid remarking the strong personal resemblance Grace bore to Mr. Beaumont as she spoke, and also the coincidence of their mental natures, the credibility as to the existence of a species of second-sight, which certain sensitive and highly organised natures were supposed by father and daughter to possess.

'But where can you go? What can you do?' questioned Ethel.

Grace stood with one elbow on the marble chimney-piece, supporting her cheek on her hand, her eyes fixed on space, and made no reply.

'Yes—Lawson—I will go there; if evil has happened, there, and there only, will it spring!'

Ethel rose and threw her arms around her sister.

‘What do you mean, darling?’

‘I must go to Lawson’s chambers this night, at once,’ said Grace.

‘To-night? Impossible; and alone?’

‘I remember papa said he would have to see Mr. Lawson on important business,’ said Grace. ‘He would naturally call on his way home from the city. I will take Jane with me, and go at once.’

Ethel knew it was a vain task to offer any remonstrance, and so quietly assented to this arrangement. In a few minutes, Grace reappeared, equipped for the journey, and, after some little delay, left the house, accompanied by Jane. The fog, which had been so dense during the afternoon, had, in a measure, cleared away, and the weather was of the usual character of a winter evening in the month of January.

In less than half-an-hour Miss Beaumont

and her servant Jane found themselves at the Temple station ; and, after a brief colloquy with the porter at the gates of the Inn, in which conference some silver money constituted an important element, they found themselves at the doorway of Mr. Lawson's chambers.

There was a light burning on the first floor, so it was with renewed hope that Grace mounted the stairs and knocked at the outer door, on which was painted in white characters—‘ Mr. Lawson.’

The locks were turned, the door slowly opened, and Lawson appeared at the threshold. He stared at his two visitors as if he could scarcely trust the evidence of his senses.

‘ Miss Beaumont ! What has happened ? Pray come in, and sit down.’

They entered the room, and seated themselves on the chairs which Lawson hastened to place for them. Lawson closed the door,

and drawing a seat in front of Grace, awaited her communication, with a face in which wonder and curiosity were strongly mingled.

‘Mr. Lawson, have you seen my father since the morning?’

‘Yes; he left this place with me about five o’clock this evening. Has he not arrived at Phillimore Place?’

‘Left with you,’ eagerly inquired Grace. ‘Then you know where he went on leaving the Temple.’

Lawson proceeded to relate that Mr. Beaumont left the chambers punctually at five, being anxious to arrive home in time for a six-o’clock dinner; that on reaching the Temple station, Mr. Beaumont suddenly remembered he had left his pocket-book on the table of Mr. Lawson’s private room; that he, Lawson, had volunteered to fetch it, leaving Mr. Beaumont at the door of the station; that the book was not found

at the chambers ; and that on his return Mr. Beaumont had disappeared, and although he had waited for nearly half-an-hour, he had not seen Mr. Beaumont since.

‘ The fog would easily explain our missing each other,’ Lawson went on to say ; ‘ and depend upon it, my dear Miss Beaumont, there will be found an explanation equally simple to account for his non-arrival at his home. No doubt you will find him there on your return.’

In spite of the reasoning of the lawyer, Grace could not check a sickening sensation of disaster, which crept over her as she listened to his words. Pale and trembling, with clasped hands, she sat the very embodiment of despair. Lawson bent over her, and taking one of her cold hands within his own, his countenance working with emotion as he did so, endeavoured by every means in his power to soothe and calm his visitor.

‘ Let me beg of you, my dear Miss

Beaumont, to take a sanguine view of the case, and to return to Kensington at once. I will, of course, accompany you. Nay, my dear young lady, I am firm on this point. I cannot suffer you to return at this late hour, with no other escort than a young servant-maid.'

Without reply, Grace slowly rose from her seat, and, as well as her trembling limbs would allow, accompanied by Lawson and the servant, proceeded to the Temple station. During the journey home neither spoke, and it was with a feeling of intense anxiety that Grace entered the forecourt of the house in Phillimore Place. Ere they could ring for admittance the door was opened by Ethel. Not a word was spoken, a glance sufficed, and the sisters sank into each other's arms. A violent fit of weeping on the part of Grace relieving her pent-up feelings, which had been strained now for some hours to their extreme limit of endurance.



CHAPTER VI.

A P R È S.

GRACE probably never knew how that night was passed. The habits of Mr. Beaumont had been so regular that the mere fact of the dinner hour passing without his appearance would have been a subject of remark. But coupled with his absence was the circumstance that his known intention at five the same evening was to be home punctual to dinner at six, and it was now midnight.

Mr. Lawson adduced the fog as a probable explanation of the absence of Mr. Beaumont; that he might have encountered some slight accident which required attention; but here he was met with the natural rejoinder, that

in such a case Mr. Beaumont would have instantly sent a messenger to Kensington with the news, and so have spared his daughters the anxiety they were now undergoing.

Mr. Lawson had no reply to this, so volunteered to communicate with the principal hospitals at the West End, and the several police stations. He showed so much emotion, and seemed so truly impressed with the gravity of the situation, that Grace almost forgot her prejudices against him, and thanked him with tearful eyes for the trouble he was taking on their behalf.

Ethel thought he had never looked so godlike—so like a beneficent angel of goodness, and as she bade him farewell, raised his hand to her lips in speechless gratitude. And then the night hours wore slowly away—the sisters listening anxiously to every footfall and sound of carriage wheels.

Towards morning a footstep was heard

rapidly approaching the house. It was a messenger with a brief note. It was from Lawson.

‘MY DEAR MISS BEAUMONT,—I am truly grieved that I have as yet no intelligence to communicate regarding my dear friend, but from the extensive inquiries I have set on foot, we *must* have news very shortly. God grant that that news may be favourable. I will call in the course of the day.—Believe me, my dear Miss Beaumont, ever your sincere friend,

GEORGE LAWSON.’

The ceremony of breakfast was scarcely over, Grace endeavouring vainly to taste a morsel, when Algernon Brown made his appearance.

It was with a very grave expression of countenance that he listened to the history which Grace proceeded to unfold concerning the mysterious disappearance of her father.

He had heard a rumour that some accident had befallen Mr. Beaumont, and had called at that early hour to learn the real state of the case.

The manner in which the voluble and loquacious Brown treated the recital caused the heart of Grace to sink anew within her. From him, at all events, she had expected encouragement and a sanguine view of her father's disappearance; but he made no reply, but strode up and down the room in silence, lost in thought.

‘Oh, Mr. Brown, surely you do not think my father is gone—is *dead!*’ exclaimed Grace in agonised accents.

‘We will hope for the best, Miss Beaumont. I will go at once and consult a friend of mine, whose business in life it is to solve riddles, and who is far better qualified than *I* am to give an opinion on this very mysterious affair. Will you excuse my taking my leave thus abruptly? I will

not lose a moment in probing this business to the bottom. Whatever suspicions I may entertain I will not give utterance to at this juncture, lest they should turn out to be without foundation. Good-bye.'

Immediately on leaving Phillimore Place, Brown jumped into a hansom and drove to a street in Chelsea. Stopping at a small house, he inquired if Mr. Daniel Woodman was at home. The servant replying in the affirmative, the cabman was dismissed, and Brown found himself seated in a stuffy parlour, contemplating a portrait in oil of Mr. Daniel Woodman, sometime attached to the Mansion House as detective, and now practising on his own account as an inquiry agent in private and delicate cases.

Presently the original of the portrait entered the room. Mr. Woodman was a stout, portly man, past middle age, wearing large bushy whiskers, and exulting in the possession of a red face, and an eye which,

for its penetrating power, deserved the appellation of 'gimblet,' which was frequently applied to it. Otherwise the expression of the face was heavy and lethargic, and by no means in accordance with that which might be expected in so renowned a master of his profession as Mr. Woodman.

'Good morning, Mr. Brown. To what am I indebted for the honour of this early call?'

Brown was proceeding to relate the history of Mr. Beaumont's disappearance, but was interrupted by a low whistle from Woodman, who exclaimed,—

'Hold hard, sir!' and produced a memorandum book from his breast-pocket, and then with pencil in hand, besought Mr. Brown to 'fire away.' Names of persons and places were duly inscribed, together with hours and minutes, and then Mr. Woodman indulged in a brown study of some two or three minutes' duration.

‘Do you know Mr. Lawson?’ inquired Brown.

‘Ay, ay, sir; great turf man,’ replied the detective.

‘No, no; he is a solicitor in the Temple,’ said Brown.

‘All the same, sir; he enters horses in the name of Temple; is the owner of the celebrated mare *Nancy*, by Wildfire, out of Helena; won the Bretby stakes in a canter, giving Zeno 10 lbs., and a beating. Lor, sir, I know him. He has also bills out to a tidy tune. I saw some of his paper the other day. Of course all this is in confidence, Mr. Brown.’

‘Of course, of course,’ replied Brown; ‘but you amaze me! ’Tis true I have only seen him twice, and conceived a dislike to him the moment I saw him; but my poor friend Mr. Beaumont thought most highly of him; indeed I have every reason to believe that Lawson was a candidate for

the position of son-in-law, and with Mr. Beaumont's approval. Well, what is the result of your cogitation, Mr. Woodman ?'

'We must find out more about that pocket-book, sir,' observed Woodman. 'I think the clue to the riddle lies in that direction. However, I suppose you would like me to operate as soon as possible, before the scent is lost. Am I to look to you for expenses, Mr. Brown ?'

'Certainly ; I will be answerable. One word before you go. Is it your impression that the disappearance of Mr. Beaumont is in any way attributable to Lawson ?'

'If it were not for the pocket-book, I should say no. I cannot see what motive he could have for wishing to get rid of Mr. Beaumont. We must find out, if possible, whether the call made yesterday afternoon at Lawson's office was a mere friendly call, or a business call ; and, as I

said before, learn something about the missing pocket-book. I can't say any more at present, sir ; but you shall hear from me, or see me to-morrow.'

' Good-day, sir.'

They left the house together, and a cab happening to be passing, it was hailed by Mr. Woodman, who drove off in the direction of the City, at the rate of ten miles an hour.

Meanwhile the hours dragged slowly on in Phillimore Place, only broken in their monotony by the calls and inquiries of friends, for the news had flown far and wide that Mr. Beaumont was missing, and conjecture was rife as to the cause of his disappearance. The majority were of opinion that he had strayed from the place appointed for the meeting of himself and Lawson, and had missed his footing, and so fallen down the steps of the Embankment into the Thames, and that owing to the dense fog which prevailed at the time, the accident had been

unperceived. A few there were who suggested suicide, and some adduced foul play on the part of some adventurous thief, who had added murder to the crime of robbery.

Edwin Gordon had been among the earliest of the inquirers, as also Mrs. Dawson and her daughter. Ethel appeared crushed and overwhelmed by the suddenness of the blow which had fallen upon them. Grace alone preserved a calmness which surprised and astonished the friends who called to express their sympathy or satisfy their curiosity. Scarcely to herself did she dare to confess the withering suspicion which haunted her like a nightmare. Strive as she would, this one burning, blasting thought seared her mind like molten lead, and the effect thereof was to impart to her demeanour a calm which astonished herself as much as it did the beholders. She would wait patiently till the morrow, and then she must see Lawson—*alone* ; and

then, if he should be cognisant of the dreadful secret, from him she would extort it, by any means and at any cost. A second note arrived from him during the day, expressing his regret that he had no tidings to furnish as to the fate of her father.

Algernon Brown called in the evening and told the story of his visit to Woodman, the detective, so far as engaging him for the solution of the mystery ; but of the facts concerning Lawson which he had gathered from the detective, Brown made no mention. He did not wish at this early stage of the case to complicate matters by giving expression to the suspicions—almost instinctive, as they might be called—which he also entertained regarding Lawson.

‘Time and the hour run through the roughest day,’ and the night arrived at last, when Grace retired to rest, but not to sleep. Glad she was to find that Ethel, worn out with grief and anxiety, slept profoundly.

The morning brought a brief note from Lawson that he would call at ten to consult with Grace as to the steps to be taken to elucidate the mystery. Punctually to the minute the lawyer was announced and duly ushered into the presence of Grace. He advanced with outstretched hand and a face eloquent of grief. With a pretence of not observing the extended hand, Grace motioned him to a seat. With features as expressionless and as pale as a Medusa or an Egyptian sphinx, Grace began,—

‘What news, Mr. Lawson?’

‘None! none whatever, I regret to say, Miss Beaumont.’

‘Was the call my poor father made upon you at the Temple on Monday one of business or pleasure?’

‘Merely a casual call—nothing more,’ replied Lawson, meeting the fixed gaze of Grace with one equally steady.

Grace rose from her seat, and with one

hand resting on the table, her pale features flushing with excitement, she exclaimed,—

‘ And you ask me to believe this ? ’

It was now Lawson’s turn to rise from his seat.

‘ Miss Beaumont, your great trouble has affected your brain. If your only object in asking for my presence here is to insult me, I will at once take my departure.’

Not till you have heard what I have to say !’ replied Grace. ‘ When you state that my poor father’s visit was merely one of ceremony, you say what is not true. I am not stating what I *think* ; I am saying what I *know*. My father told me, immediately after the party, that he would have to call upon you in a day or two on business of importance. That he should know no rest till he had done so ; and after this you ask me to believe the visit to the Temple was merely a *casual* call ! As to the fate of my poor father, God

knows what that may have been! No being on earth, *except perhaps yourself*, is cognisant of the truth. If my suspicions are correct, and I sadly fear me they are, the truth will some day be manifest; and to arrive at that knowledge shall be the one end and object of my existence!’

Lawson still remained standing, his countenance very pale, with his eyes steadily fixed upon Grace, as she sank into her chair, overpowered with excitement. With the slightest perceptible touch of irony in his voice, he inquired,—

‘Have you done, madam?’

Grace inclined her head.

‘Then I take my leave, in the hope that as your nervous system recovers the shock it has sustained, so will your good sense and a feeling of justice cause you to repent of the—I must say—absurd suspicions to which you have given expression regarding me this day. Farewell!’



CHAPTER VII.

EXODUS.



WEEK elapsed without the slightest clue being obtained as to the fate of the missing merchant. Conjecture, of course, was rife as to the solution of the mystery, more especially in Kensington. At length there appeared in the columns of an evening paper the following unpleasant announcement:—

‘We apprehend there is not much mystery as to the cause of the disappearance of Mr. Beaumont, the well-known merchant in the city. His affairs are found to be in a most disastrous condition; and this, combined with his indifferent state of health, may have caused the unhappy man to put an end to

an existence the evils of which he was unable to confront any longer.'

Algernon Brown entered the drawing-room one morning, about mid-day, and found Grace alone.

'I have just seen Mr. Lawson, my dear Miss Beaumont, and I regret to hear that in consequence of the interview which took place about a week ago between yourself and Mr. Lawson, future meetings are, I may say, impossible. Mr. Lawson is no favourite of mine, as you very well know, but he was your father's man of business, and I do not see how his affairs are to be wound up, unless you can so far sacrifice, what we will call for the moment, your prejudices, and meet Mr. Lawson.'

'Impossible, Mr. Brown. I dare not breathe, even to *you*, the dreadful suspicion I entertain as to Mr. Lawson's share in my poor father's death; for that he is dead, I have no manner of doubt.'

‘Pardon me, Miss Beaumont, but I think there is very great doubt. We have not the slightest proof of his death. I was about to suggest an alternative. That you should empower me to act for you and your sister in this awkward state of things; and report progress as we go on.’

‘I can never be sufficiently grateful to you, Mr. Brown, for the suggestion.’

Brown continued,—

‘I have had a long chat with the chief clerk at your papa’s office in the city, and, I regret to say, he fully confirms the very awkward rumours in circulation, relative to your father’s affairs—you observe, Miss Beaumont, I do not say your late father. But there is one circumstance the clerk is totally unable to account for. Your father was the possessor of an enormous amount of foreign bonds, of which no trace is now discoverable, or any record of their sale. Now, if they existed, although they would

not put affairs straight, yet they would pay a small dividend to the creditors, even after securing to you and your sister any settlement which may have been made on your behalf by Mr. Beaumont. This is a matter of the greatest importance to you and your sister, in order that there should be some visible means for your support ; and I regret to say there appears to me to be literally *nothing !*'

So it was settled that Brown should act as intermediary between the sisters and Lawson. Not a day passed but Brown called in Phillimore Place and saw Grace, and returned to Lawson with fresh instructions.

But no silver lining appeared to the black cloud which had thus overwhelmed the fortunes and prospects of the Beaumonts. Grace was seated in her accustomed place in the drawing-room, awaiting the daily call of Algernon Brown, when Mr. Gordon was announced.

Ethel was rarely visible now, generally preferring the privacy of her own chamber ; where she could indulge in the luxury of woe to her heart's content, perfectly undisturbed, and not worried with any horrid business details.

Grace rose to greet her visitor, the usual blush mantling her cheek as Gordon pressed her hand with sympathetic clasp.

‘ I trust you are well, and Miss Ethel—’

Edwin glanced round the room as if in search of some other form.

‘ Ethel is suffering from headache, but I have no doubt she will see you.’

‘ No ; on consideration, I think I had better say what I have to say to you.’

Edwin contemplated the interior of his hat with considerable curiosity, but after a few preliminary hems thus began,—

‘ I presume you are aware that on the occasion of the party I made Miss Ethel an offer of marriage.’

‘I am bound to confess, Mr. Gordon, that my sister did tell me something of the kind had taken place. You must not think hardly of Ethel for divulging a secret which is generally held to be sacred ; but we have never had any secrets from each other, and Ethel is so young, and has been accustomed from childhood to ask my advice in everything.’

‘Then you also know, Miss Beaumont, that my proposal was rejected?’

‘I do.’

‘I have called to-day to renew that proposal. I am fully aware of the invidious character such a proceeding must bear, appearing as if I imagined that Ethel would accept the love which I tender, now that her worldly circumstances have changed for the worse ; but I cannot help it. It will at least prove the disinterestedness and unselfishness of my love. I wish you to intercede for me, to use your influence as an elder sister, and promote my suit.’

‘ You must love my sister very much,’ said Grace, thinking aloud rather than speaking her thoughts.

‘ My whole future depends upon her answer ; and then you, Grace, will live with us,—will you not ? And so two sisters who are all to each other now, will still be together.’

The heart of Grace warmed to the handsome artist, who in the midst of the confession of love for one sister, was planning a home and subsistence for the other. But the bitter task must be gone through, and in answer to the urgent request of Edwin, Grace proceeded to the chamber of her sister, to win the hand of Ethel for the only man she herself could ever love.

Grace was not long absent, but presently returned with a brief note from Ethel.

‘ DEAR MR. GORDON,—My sister has told me that you renew the offer of marriage

which you made to me a fortnight ago. I can only say that had I accepted that offer when it was tendered, I should consider it my bounden duty to relieve you from your promise under the present deplorable circumstances connected with the death or disappearance of my dear father. Fully appreciating the disinterestedness of your conduct, believe me, ever yours truly,

‘ETHEL BEAUMONT.’

Gordon read the note, and with a deep sigh raised the hand of Grace to his lips, and left the room without saying a word. Scarcely had he done so when Mrs. Dawson was announced. She embraced Miss Beaumont with great effusiveness, and her eyes filled with tears as she poured forth her condolences.

‘So hard upon you, my dear, after being brought up in the lap of luxury, as one may say, to have to give it all up, and perhaps

have to earn your own living. I am sure we will do all in our power to assist you—that you may rely upon.’

‘We shall not trouble our friends, Mrs. Dawson. We will seek our fate among strangers, if God so wills that we have to work for our living.’

‘Oh, that you must never do, my dear. What could any one of us do without friends? I suppose you have not seen the papers? No; I should not have told you. They are quite unanimous that your papa is still alive, and that he has only absconded, so you may see him again some day, my dear; and that should be a comfort to you.’

‘Mrs. Dawson, I would rather that my poor father were drowned in the Thames, than that he should be living a disgraced man—a fraudulent bankrupt; and now I must beg you, Mrs. Dawson, to speak no more on this subject.’

‘Well, my dear, I won’t. Can I see Ethel, in her own room. I promise you I won’t say one unpleasant word. Ah! here is Carrie.’

The two friends embraced, and mingled their tears together. Miss Dawson was the first to speak.

‘Now, Gracie, dear, I want to say something before mamma returns. I have settled it all, and you must agree at once. You are both to come and live with me; that is, of course, till you both make two fellows the happiest men in the world by marrying them. I will take no denial. You know I have plenty of money of my own, quite independent of mamma.’

Grace smiled through her tears.

‘You have not considered another contingency!’

‘What is that?’ replied Carrie, opening her large blue eyes in her usual wondering manner.

‘What would become of us if *you* chanced to make some fellow the happiest man in the world? Algernon Brown, for instance.’

Miss Dawson blushed like a peony.

‘Oh! but we won’t contemplate such a state of things. You consent, do you not, Grace?’

Miss Beaumont shook her head sadly.

‘No, Carrie; I will never be dependent on friends—not even on you, darling.’

Miss Dawson again brought all her eloquence to bear, but in vain. Grace smiled, and kissed her friend and shed a tear or two, and so the conference came to an end.

For some days after the visit of the Dawsons, Grace appeared to her sister and Brown, when he made his daily call, to be preoccupied and absorbed to an extent they had never observed since the great trouble which had fallen on them. And three days in succession Grace went out alone in a cab, and was absent for some hours. The

neighbourhood was now placarded with bills announcing the sale of the furniture and effects in Phillimore Place, under an order in bankruptcy. So one fine morning, as Ethel was about to retire as usual to her room, and thus avoid callers and business both,—Grace expressed a wish that Ethel should remain.

‘I wish to speak to you on business, dear.’

‘You know I hate business, Grace, and of what earthly use is my opinion; I shall be satisfied with anything you may arrange.’

‘Yes, Ethel, dear, but I must talk to you on the subject.’

Ethel resumed her seat, and, covering her face with her hands, passively awaited her sister’s communication.

‘Ethel, we must leave this place, and at once. The sale takes place next week. We must not only leave all behind us, we must even leave our names!’

‘Our names!’ said Ethel, in wondering tones.

‘Yes, the name of Beaumont is for a while disgraced ; but only for a while, I firmly believe. We will take with us a change of clothing, our little jewellery, and £20 I have left of my pocket-money, and seek our fortunes in a new world—that is, new to us.’

‘Leave London?’ inquired Ethel.

‘No, there is more chance of our remaining undiscovered in a suburb of London than in any country place, and a far better chance of getting our living.’

‘What a horrid expression,’ said Ethel, ‘getting our living.’

Grace continued,—

‘I have found lodgings which will, I think, suit us.’

‘Is that where you have been in those mysterious cab journeys?’ inquired Ethel.

‘Yes; and now, dear, I must ask you to prepare for our departure this evening.’

‘This evening!’ exclaimed Ethel.

‘Yes, as it has to be done, the sooner it is done the better.’

Grace had carefully planned delaying the announcement of her scheme till the last moment, being fully aware of her sister’s lack of reticence and firmness of purpose. So the afternoon was spent in writing letters of farewell to the few friends who were still left to them. Explaining their purpose of endeavouring to lead a life of independence, although it might be one of penury, in preference to trespassing on the charity and kindness of friends. These letters were not written without sundry tears on the part of Grace and Ethel. The three large boxes which contained their apparel were soon prepared, and then the moment came when they were to take leave of the house in which they had been born, and the neighbourhood where they had spent so many happy days. Jane was now the

only servant in the house, and it was not without considerable curiosity that she beheld the two young ladies enter the cab, and the luggage duly placed on the top. Grace had paid her a month's wages in advance that morning, so it was with tearful eyes that Jane inquired—

‘Oh! Miss, are you never coming back again?’

‘Some day, Jane, we hope to do so. Good-bye.’

The cabman was told to drive to a particular shop in Oxford Street, and it was with a feeling of intense bewilderment that Jane watched the cab rapidly disappear in the dusk of the evening.





CHAPTER VIII.

CAMDEN TOWN.

IT was a cold, bleak evening in March — the dust whirling in blinding clouds—when Madame Casentini might be seen peering anxiously over the top of the wire-blind in the parlour window of her house in Cardington Street, Camden Town.

There was a brass-plate on the door, which bore this inscription, ‘Signor Casentini, Sculptor.’ This was a true description in a certain sense, inasmuch as the Signor was the head man to Mr. Phidias, the renowned British sculptor, who had his studio close at hand, near the Regent’s Park.

Signor Casentini had commenced life in a very humble capacity, and had carried plaster-casts on a board through the streets of the Metropolis, during which peregrinations he had made the acquaintance and won the heart and hand of Miss Bridget O'Leary, maid-of-all-work at a house near Tottenham Court Road.

The Signor had prospered in a measure since the happy event, now nearly twenty years ago ; was entrusted with important work by Mr. Phidias, and had already accumulated considerable savings. Notwithstanding which fact, both the Signor and his wife continued their course of frugality and industry, and materially increased their income by letting ' Lodgings—Furnished ' to persons of undoubted respectability. For had they not an inducement so to do in the person of Leonora, their only child, now nearly nineteen years of age, and, in the estimation of her parents, an earthly paragon

of beauty and talent such as the world had never before seen ?

The lamplighter had returned from his evening task, and the muffin-boy had made the street resound with the ringing of his bell ; but although it was past the hour appointed for Madame Casentini's afternoon meal, yet she 'neither spoke nor moved.'

In a short time the patience of Madame Casentini was rewarded, and with the exclamation 'At last !' she left the window as a four-wheeled cab drove up to the door. On the top of the cab were three large boxes, and inside the cab were two young ladies, dressed in deep mourning.

The street door was opened by Madame Casentini herself, who did not await the arrival of the servant, but rang the bell, and crossed the pavement to welcome her new lodgers,—for such they were.

'How do you do, Miss Belmour. I am so glad you have come. I was afraid you had

been prevented by something or other—your sister? How do you do, Miss?’

The young ladies descended from the cab, and were duly escorted to the first floor by Madame—the while Eliza superintended the removal of the luggage.

The Misses Belmour could hardly forbear remarking the artistic character of the house as they entered. The walls of the passage were covered with *bassi-relievi*. On the landing was the marble bust of a Hebe, and on the chimney-piece of the drawing-room was a bronze copy of the Graces by Thorwaldsen. Two or three tolerable paintings in oil completed the artistic embellishments.

The tallest Miss Belmour sank into an arm-chair placed near the fire, and scarcely noticed the preparations which had been made by the landlady for their comfort. The kettle was singing merrily on the hob; the tea-equipage was on the table, with a

new loaf and half-a-pound of fresh butter duly provided by their landlady.

As Madame Casentini proceeded to light the gas in the small bronze chandelier, she chattered away, and hoped that her preparations gave satisfaction. Observing that one of the Miss Belmours sat with her face buried in her hands, apparently under the influence of some great grief,—

‘Ah! Miss, you no doubt know what trouble is, but you little know what me and my husband the Signor have gone through before we were as comfortable as this—and I dare say this is a come-down for you, Miss; but when I married Casentini he was only an image boy, and as for me, I was a general servant in Warren Street; and when we left the church we had only seven-and-sixpence to begin the world with. Ah! often and often, when I speak of those times, does Casentini say, “Don’t tell dem tings,” but lor’! what do I care? I am proud of it.

Here we have a house of our own, and no end of money banked ; and Mr. Phidias thinks there is no one like my husband ; and my Leonora has had the best of educations—singing, and French, and drawing—quite the young lady, I assure you, Miss. She is cleaning herself just now, or I would ask her to come up ; but lor', Miss, there is plenty of time ; you will see lots of my daughter. But you seem tired, Miss, and I daresay want your tea. I'm sure *I* do ; so I'll go. Be sure and ring if there is anything short, and me or Eliza will be ready to come up at once—so good evening for the present, Miss.'

Exit Madame Casentini.

The tallest Miss Belmour removed her hands from her face, and disclosed her tearful countenance, extended her arms towards her sister with an imploring gesture, and uttered, in heartbroken accents, one word—
'Grace.'

Her sister sank on her knees at her feet, and threw her arms round her, and laying her cheek against that of her sister, murmured—

‘Ethel, dear Ethel.’

For some moments neither spake; till at length Ethel allowed herself to be persuaded to taste the cup of tea, and by degrees she became more calm, and listened to the soothing words which Grace murmured in her ear. Ethel glanced round the room, and uttered, in tones of despair,—

‘And *this* is to be our future home!’

Grace smiled consolingly.

‘Well, Ethel, dear, it is not equal to the home we have left at dear Kensington; but I am ‘sure we shall be very happy here.’

‘Happy!’ echoed Ethel, with a shudder.

‘And,’ continued Grace, ‘you little know the weary search I had to undergo even to find a home like this; for our stock of worldly wealth is very little, as you know,

dear, but before that is gone, let us hope we may soon replenish our little store, for I am full of plans, and—'

'Tell me, Grace,' interrupted Ethel, with an approach to a smile, 'what these wonderful plans are?'

'Not to-night, darling—not till you have had a good night's rest; to-morrow I will tell you all.'

'No, Grace, no; it is useless. I shall have no sleep to-night till I have some light shed on our future.'

Grace paused, considered a moment, and thus began,—

'Well, Ethel, dear, there is one thing we will *not* do,—we will not go out as governesses; that is what they always do in *novels*. We will paint water-colour sketches, and sell them to the print shops, and I will write a novel!'

'A novel!' exclaimed Ethel in tones of surprise.

‘Yes, a novel. I have the greater part already written. You often wondered why I was so busy writing, and why I refused to tell you. Well, I was engaged in describing the troubles and anxieties experienced by Arthur and Julia before they became united in the holy bands of matrimony. The recipe for a popular novel is very simple. Mind, Ethel, I say a *popular* novel, not a *good* one, which is sometimes a very different thing. Plenty of love-making, plenty of mystery, plenty of surprises, plenty of incident; above all, as Scott observes in his preface to “Rokeby,” *be interesting*.’

Ethel shook her head in very dubious fashion.

‘It may be easy to write one perhaps, but how will you get it published?’

‘*Nous verrons*,’ replied Grace.

‘And if these plans fail?’

‘Then we will try other plans,’ said Grace. ‘And now, Ethel, having complied

with your request, I insist on your going to bed at once, for to-morrow we must begin the campaign.'

With some show of reluctance, Ethel submitted to the dictation of her sister, and retired to the room adjoining; for all the space occupied by the sisters was limited to two rooms.

Left to herself, the countenance of Grace assumed a careworn aspect; the sparkle seemed to vanish from her eye, and the colour from her cheek. She slowly unpacked one of the trunks, and took from thence a portfolio of sketches, and eagerly scanned them with regard to the probable value or price they might secure in the picture market. Then she quietly opened the folding-doors which separated the sitting-room from the bedroom, and having ascertained from the regular breathing of Ethel that she was for a time oblivious of all worldly care, sat down at her writing-desk,

and with rapid pen proceeded to cover page after page of manuscript with the woes and troubles of Arthur and Julia. The floor was littered with the leaves ere she retired to rest, and sought in sleep fresh strength for the coming trials of the morrow.





CHAPTER IX.

STRUGGLES.

NINE o'clock had struck on the morning succeeding the incidents we have related, ere Ethel awoke from her slumbers. For a few moments she failed to remember the events of the last few weeks, but slowly and surely they rose before her mental vision. The death of her father—the flight of her sister and herself from their Kensington home—their change of name and their arrival at the lodging-house at Camden Town. Then her thoughts turned to the future, and there all was blank! How much money Grace was possessed of Ethel knew not, and she had little or no hope of any tangible success resulting from the plans of her sister.

Ethel rose from her couch, and peeped through the folding-doors which divided the apartments. Yes! there sat Grace absorbed at her task of authorship, with a pile of MS. on the floor beside her. Ethel smiled faintly at the enthusiasm of her sister, and then proceeded to perform her toilet. In due course she made her appearance in the sitting-room, and was welcomed with a bright smile and a kiss from Grace.

The night's repose, the balmy sleep she had enjoyed—'Nature's soft nurse'—had effected wonders in her appearance, and she almost looked like the Ethel of happier days. Hastily gathering up her MS., Grace proceeded to attend to the breakfast, informing Ethel at the same time that she hoped in a day or two to see Arthur and Julia happily married, when, of course, their troubles would be over, and they would live happily ever afterwards, according to the established rule in the fiction-world, notwithstanding the pro-

verb, 'When a man marries his troubles begin.'

No sooner was the breakfast despatched, than Grace proposed that they should, without delay, journey forth in quest of an art-patron. Ethel made no opposition, and languidly consented to the arrangement. Since the great trouble which had fallen like a thunderbolt on their lives, Ethel had tacitly agreed to every plan which had been formulated by Grace—sometimes to the annoyance, to a certain extent, of her more actively disposed sister.

'But, Ethel, dear, don't you think it wise that no time should be lost? I want you to express some opinion.'

'Yes, Grace; whatever you think best,' querulously replied Ethel. 'I wish you would not be always asking my opinion. You know I always agree to everything you suggest.'

Grace could scarcely conceal an expres-

sion of disappointment which passed rapidly across her features. A tap at the door was heard, and Madame Casentini entered the room. The voice at once declared the fact to the ear, but it required a second glance ere the personality was revealed to the eye. Instead of the showy silk dress and smart ribbons which had decorated the figure of the landlady on the previous evening, they now beheld a shabbily-clad woman, who carried a large wicker basket on her arm.

Madame Casentini smiled, evidently enjoying the surprise of her new tenants. ‘I have just been to market, miss, and have got some lovely soles—only sixpence a pair! You see, miss, I have got on all my old things. I always go marketing like this, and carry home things myself. They would have charged me eighteenpence a pair if I had gone in my best silk, or if I had sent my servant and let them send the fish home.

Would you like some soles for your dinner, Miss ?’

Grace thanked Madame Casentini, but said that it was so uncertain at what hour they would return, that they would dispense with a home dinner on the present occasion.

‘I hope you don’t mind the piano down stairs ? Miss, Leonora always practises five hours a-day. It’s the only way to become a good player.’

With these words, Madame Casentini withdrew.

A few minutes sufficed to equip Grace for her expedition ; and during the longer period required by her sister, Grace occupied herself in selecting the most likely sketches from the portfolio. Without any definite idea as to the locality where they would endeavour to dispose of the pictures, they at length found themselves gazing into the window of a picture-seller in the Strand, and, after some natural hesitation, entered

the shop, and inquired for Mr. Jones. The shopman disappeared, and presently returned, followed by his master. Mr. Jones was a portly, good-looking man, and, bowing to the young ladies, inquired their business. With trembling fingers, Grace produced the sketches from the portfolio, and submitted them for his inspection. Mr. Jones first glanced keenly at the drawings, then at the sisters, whose new mournings bore no impress of narrow means or poverty, and observed, in hesitating tones,—

‘Do I understand, Miss, that these drawings are for sale?’

Grace bowed in token of assent.

Mr. Jones gave a deep sigh, and shook his head, as he turned over the several sketches.

‘I fear you are not impressed with their excellence,’ observed Grace, with a sad smile.

‘On the contrary, Miss,’ hurriedly replied the print-seller, ‘they possess considerable merit, very considerable merit ; but, alas ! so do the majority of the pictures submitted for my inspection. I presume I am addressing an amateur. Quite so. Well ; we have professional artists who call here daily, and you would scarcely credit the smallness of the sums they are contented to accept for their works. But if you will only glance at the prices affixed to some of the pictures in the window, you will give full credence to what I am saying. There is a very nice little picture, three pounds ; the frame alone cost me a pound, and as out of the balance there is my commission for sale, I leave you to imagine the result to the artist himself. I should be very glad to pay more ; but if I charged more, the picture would not find a purchaser, and both the artist and myself would, of course, suffer in consequence.’

Grace observed that she would be content with a very moderate sum : that both herself and her sister might have to depend for their livelihood on this resource, as they were without either friends or relatives. Grace fancied she beheld a suspicion of a tear in the eye of the good-natured-looking shopkeeper, but he only replied,—

‘ I am sorry to hear what you state ; but, of course, I *must* treat your application from a business point of view. I will give you the names of a few picture-dealers, and you can try them ; and, I hope, with better results.’ ‘ And,’ added Mr. Jones, after a pause, observing the downcast expression of Grace’s face, ‘ should you not be successful, I tell you what I will do. You can leave them with me, and I will show them in the window ; and I will hand you over the proceeds when sold, after deducting my usual commission. But let me beg of you, my dear young lady, to put a low

price, a very low price, on them, or we shall both be left in the lurch. If I had time, I could explain many things about picture sales, with which you are necessarily ignorant. How there is a mania for a name, and the following year the value of that name has depreciated fifty per cent., without any reason that we can discover. Then, every new millionaire considers his gallery incomplete unless he has a "Turner" on the wall ; and he will give upwards of a thousand pounds for a specimen a few inches in length. Not because he has any special admiration for that great artist, but because it is the right thing to do. Good morning, ladies ; I wish you success.'

Mr. Jones bowed, and retired into his business parlour.

Grace and Ethel spent the whole of the day in calling on the several picture-dealers at the West-end of London, but no success crowned their efforts. There was not much

variety in the reasons assigned for the non-purchasing of the drawings—the chief reason being the abundant supply of a far superior article.

After partaking of a slight meal at a pastry cook's in Regent Street, the sisters returned to the shop of Mr. Jones, and left three of the drawings for exhibition in the window, after expressing their regret that they were not in a position to undergo the expense of frames, which Mr. Jones offered to provide at as cheap a rate as he could afford consistently with a due regard to his profits from a business point of view.

Grace was unusually silent during their journey home. The failure to dispose of the drawings had been so complete, that even Grace felt her hopes die within her, and it was with the greatest difficulty she could preserve her ordinary cheerful demeanour.

Ethel did not betray the slightest emotion,

as she had indulged in no hopes, so she was now the victim of no disappointment.

Ethel passed the evening in reading a novel, which she had brought from Kensington. Grace, in pursuing the fortunes of Arthur and Julia to their destined determination.

And so the days flew by—Grace working diligently at her novel, except when trying fresh channels for the sale of their drawings, in which expeditions she was always accompanied by Ethel, who declined to be left moping alone in strange lodgings, exposed to the inroads of Madame Casentini,—although, to do their landlady justice, she had latterly been less intrusive, finding that they seemed so preoccupied with business of importance.

At length, one morning, Grace announced to Ethel that her novel was at length completed, and ready for transmission to a publisher. The MS. was accordingly des-

patched by post, as Grace felt quite unequal to the ordeal of leaving it in person; a display of moral weakness which caused no little astonishment on the part of Ethel, who was accustomed to regard her elder sister as devoid of any weakness of character whatever. Grace had prepared Ethel for weeks of weary waiting, remarking with justice that her MS. would not be the only novel which would have to undergo the supervision of the eminent publishers, Messrs. Miller.

How can we describe the surprise and astonishment of the sisters, to find a letter from the publishers on their return from one of their picture expeditions on the day following the despatch of the MS. ?

Hastily tearing open the envelope, Grace read as follows :—‘ Madame,—We are in receipt of the MS. of a novel, entitled “Julia.” Our time is so fully occupied for a considerable period, that it is utterly im-

possible we can undertake the publication, and therefore think it best to return you the MS. without any further delay.'

'Sensible and business-like,' sententiously, observed Grace. 'Far better than writing a similar answer after six months of suspense and waiting.' Grace proceeded with the perusal of the letter. 'We have not looked at the MS., as the probability is that in that case our decision would be precisely the same as it is in the present instance.—Yours obediently,—MILLER & Co.' Grace read the last paragraph a second time. Her cheek flushed with indignation as she read aloud the words. 'An insult, as gratuitous as it is uncalled for. The taste on a par with the composition.'

'I do not see anything to find fault with,' exclaimed Ethel, watching her sister with astonishment as she paced the room to and fro. 'I think it is a very civil letter.'

'Civil!' echoed Grace; 'yes, if the letter

had terminated with the opening paragraph. How can they tell when and where the future Evans or Dickens is to arise? The genius which descended from heaven as the birthright of an Ayrshire ploughman becomes the appanage a few years afterwards of a Peer of the Realm !'

Never had Ethel seen Grace so excited. In her old suave tones Ethel endeavoured to console Grace, observing that it might be their ill-fortune to experience a series of refusals ere they achieved success.

'We will say no more about it, Ethel,' said Grace, 'but forward the MS. to another publisher. It is very improbable we shall ever receive a similar reply.' And so the novel entitled 'Julia' was again despatched.

The month of March passed away, and was succeeded by April with its sunshine and its showers, followed by May, which 'set in with its usual severity.'

Grace became alarmed as she examined

her diminishing funds, but resolved to keep the fact a secret from Ethel, at all events for the present.

Ethel had subsided into a condition from which all emotion, whether of joy or grief, seemed equally banished.

Two of the drawings left with Mr. Jones had found purchasers ; but as they only realised thirty shillings each, the fact of the sale was not encouraging.

The rent of the rooms they occupied was eighteen shillings a week, and it was of course indispensable that this expense should be punctually discharged. Grace had not paid any rent during the last fortnight, and she could not help fancying that Madame Casentini was less gracious than usual.

Grace was now reduced to her last sovereign, and it was quite clear that some steps must be taken without delay to increase her store of worldly wealth.

Ethel had been complaining of a cold, and Grace succeeded in persuading her to remain at home while she made her usual weekly visit to the printseller. Grace entered an omnibus, which set her down at Charing Cross. Turning up one of the narrow streets leading to the Thames, she stopped at a small side door of a shop, whose front faced the Strand. On a board over the door was written the words, 'Money lent.' Never before had Grace entered a similar place. Glancing down the street she passed the doorway, and then turned sharply round and stepped rapidly across the threshold and found herself in a little box in front of the counter. The place appeared to be empty, and so a shopman at once advanced towards her. Her agitation was so extreme that the man decided at once that she was a novice, and so directed her attention to a bolt which fastened the door behind her. At

the same time he drew out a sliding panel from the screen at her side, so as effectually to hide her from the gaze of any customer who might chance to enter the adjoining compartment.

Grace never spoke, but withdrew a diamond ring from her finger and laid it on the counter before her. The man took it up, examined it keenly, and disappeared for a few moments. Returning, he inquired what sum she required.

‘Whatever you please,’ said Grace, in the faintest possible whisper. ‘I mean as much as you can afford to give.’

‘Ten pounds ; will that do ?’

‘Yes ; oh yes,’ said Grace.

The man presented her with a ticket, and placed ten sovereigns before her. Hastily gathering the money into her purse, Grace lost not a moment in making her exit into the open air, and was breathing a prayer of thanksgiving that this trouble was over,

when in her haste she trod upon the foot of a gentleman who happened to be passing. Murmuring a few words of apology, she was walking rapidly on, when the words, 'Miss Beaumont,' fell upon her ear. Looking up, she beheld—*Algernon Brown!*





CHAPTER X.

FOUND.

OVERWHELMED as she was with shame and confusion, Grace did not hear one word of the torrent of inquiries which poured from the lips of Brown. She had mechanically taken the arm which he had offered her, and suffered him to lead her down the quiet street, towards the river, so that they could exchange a few words apart from the multitude in the Strand.

Gradually his questioning assumed a gentler tone, as his quick eye observed the change which had taken place in her face and figure. The former was wan and thin, and showed traces of anxiety and care and nightly vigils,

while her figure had become more fragile during the few months of her life at Camden Town.

Questions as to her and her sister's health were soon answered, and then a lengthened pause ensued. Brown felt the awkwardness of putting any direct questions as to her prospects and the locality of her abode ; and yet he was loth to bid her adieu till he had acquired that information.

Recovering in a measure from the suddenness of the meeting, Grace put some inquiries in her turn.

‘ How were the Campbells and the Dawsons ? ’ and at last, in as unconcerned a tone as she could accomplish, Grace ventured to ask whether he had seen Mr. Gordon lately ?

‘ Not very recently,’ said Brown. ‘ He does not seem to go about so much as he did. I suppose he is working hard ; and I think, Miss Beaumont, he felt the great trouble which has befallen you very acutely.

He appeared so grieved for Miss Ethel, and for you too, of course, Miss Beaumont; but I fancy the bulk of his sympathies was for your sister, as he did not consider she was so well constituted to bear up against so unforeseen a trouble. May I tell him I have seen you?' continued Brown, 'and that you and your sister are well and happy?'

'You can say we are quite well, and as happy as circumstances will permit—and,' observed Grace after a momentary pause, 'that we hope to meet again at some future and more prosperous season. Now, I must say good-bye, Mr. Brown.'

'Pardon me, my dear Miss Beaumont, I am sure you will view what I am about to say in a proper light—but can I be of any service to you in any possible way? You know you can command me. Will you allow me to call upon you and your sister?'

'It is impossible,' replied Grace, coldly but

calmly. 'There is nothing you could do which we could accept. But I thank you heartily and sincerely.'

'Will you promise to write to me if you should ever require advice or—a friend?'

'I will,' said Grace, with one of her old bright smiles. 'Good-bye.'

She turned away and left him. The flood of memories and associations which this meeting with Brown had revived almost caused her to pass the end of Cardington Street, till reminded by the conductor of the omnibus that she had arrived at her destination.

On entering the sitting-room, Grace found Ethel reclining very comfortably in an arm-chair, immersed in the pages of the third volume of a novel.

Ethel at once perceived that something unusual had occurred, from the agitated manner of her sister, as she sank into a chair.

‘What is it, dear Grace?’ said Ethel, casting her book on one side, and seating herself on a stool at her sister’s feet.

‘Ethel, I have seen Algernon Brown!’

‘Indeed,’ said Ethel calmly.

‘And the sight of his well-known face,’ continued Grace, ‘has recalled many bitter memories and recollections of happier days—days, I fear, never to return. I met him—near the Strand.’ Grace covered her face with her hands, as if to shut out the recollection of that *mal apropos* meeting.

Ethel rose from her stool, and seizing the hand of her sister, said eagerly—

‘Your ring, Grace! you have lost your ring!’

The face of Grace became the colour of crimson, as she slowly replied,—

‘Not lost, Ethel, only lent. I did not mean to tell you, Ethel dear, but there was no alternative; we were reduced to our last sovereign.’

‘O Grace! and have you been alone to so dreadful a place as that. Dear Grace! how unselfish you are.’

The arms of Ethel wound themselves round the form of Grace, and the two sisters mingled their tears together.

A letter on the breakfast-table the following morning created considerable curiosity. The handwriting was unknown to them, and their address being a profound secret from every one except the publisher, it is scarcely necessary to say they seldom had any letters. Opening the envelope, as a clue to the mystery, a piece of folded paper fell to the ground. It was a Bank of England note for £20! On a slip of paper inside the envelope was written the words, ‘From a Friend.’

‘’Tis from Algernon Brown,’ at once exclaimed Grace.

‘How can that be, Grace? You say that you did not give him your address?’

‘He must have followed me,’ said Grace.
‘I shall write to him at once.’

Drawing her writing-case towards her, Grace rapidly penned the following note:—

‘DEAR MR. BROWN,—On reconsideration, my sister and I will be very glad if you *could* call on us *as soon as possible*, any time after twelve.—Yours faithfully,

‘GRACE BEAUMONT.

‘P.S.—You must ask for Miss Belmour.’

As Grace wrote these words, she inspected the envelope which had arrived by post that morning. It was addressed ‘Miss Belmour.’

‘Both mysteries can be cleared up when Algernon Brown calls to-morrow,’ wisely observed Grace.

Soon after twelve on the following day, Mr. Algernon Brown was announced. He was not quite in his ordinary state of calm self-possession, but greeted the sisters with his usual *savoir faire*.

Grace did not waste much time, and after the usual common-places, she laid the envelope before him and said,—

‘ This came from you, Mr. Brown, and this was the enclosure,’ laying the £20-note on the table.

Prepared as he probably was for some such statement, he was hardly ready for so straightforward an attack. As he hesitated, Grace resumed,—

‘ Believe me, Mr. Brown, both my sister and myself feel most deeply your generosity, but, at the same time, it is impossible we can avail ourselves of your kindness. How did you find us out? I presume you followed me after I left you yesterday? ’

Mr. Brown was not in the habit of blushing, but he indulged in that unusual novelty on this occasion.

‘ And you will not allow me to be your banker, Miss Beaumont? ’

Grace shook her head smilingly.

‘Not for a time?’ pursued Brown; ‘to be rigidly repaid with interest at some distant date.’

Perceiving the sphinx-like expression of Grace’s features, Brown reluctantly took up the note and placed it in his waistcoat pocket.

A sense of embarrassment seemed to possess the company for some moments, so Brown mechanically took up the novel which Ethel had laid down when their visitor was announced, and read, ‘Daniel Deronda.’

‘Are you of opinion, Mr. Brown,’ said Ethel, ‘that the author is correct as to the vast requirements of a *successful* actress?’

‘I am not, Miss Ethel,’ replied Brown in an emphatic tone. ‘The qualifications necessary for a *great* actress—one worthy of the name—have never before been so eloquently described in any work, whether that book be fiction or dramatic biography. But Gwendolen was not only beautiful, pos-

sessed of charms beyond the average of her sex, but gifted with great abilities. With those qualifications, and three months' professional tuition as to the mechanical arts and tricks of the stage from my friend Jack Walker (who played with Macready forty years ago), and I would guarantee that she would have filled old Drury for a twelve-month, and in ten years have made a fortune. We only know the past by tradition, but we have seen nothing in our time approaching the excellence described in the book before me, and I could name one or two very successful actresses who have become famous, and can make their hundred guineas a week.'

Ethel appeared lost in thought. At length, with her lovely face suffused with blushes, and her voice trembling with emotion, which Brown thought would have made the fortune of a Viola, she thus began,—

'Mr. Brown, I know I cannot pretend to

either the beauty or the talents of a Gwendolen, but do you think *I* could obtain any success as an actress ?’

Grace rose from her chair, speechless with wonder and amazement, remained standing for a few moments, then resumed her seat, her eyes still expressing wonder. Brown also remained silent.

Ethel continued, in tearful tones,—

‘ Oh ! I cannot tell you, Mr. Brown, how anxious I am to do *something*, no matter what, to help dear Grace in her struggles for our livelihood. I feel such an encumbrance to her. Day by day, Grace is either painting fresh pictures, or calling on the picture man to know if they are sold. And now she has commenced another novel, although the first one has been twice refused. And I do so wish I could do *something*.’

Brown contemplated the fire-paper as though he were in a dream, so unexpected

was the speech of Ethel. At last he stammered forth,—

‘I confess I am completely taken aback with this unforeseen proposal. But, my dear Miss Ethel, I will give the matter my consideration ; and, in the meantime, will take the best advice in London,—that is, ask my friend Tom Richardson.’

‘Mr. Richardson!’ said the sisters, in a breath.

‘No, pardon me, my dear young ladies ; not *Mr.* Richardson. He is not thus known ; but Tom Richardson. Everybody in the dramatic world, and nearly everybody in the literary world, knows poor Tom Richardson. He is the best adapter of a French play known to the stage, and will, in the fulness of time, make his mark as an original playwright of no ordinary character, or my name is not Algernon Brown. You will say, Why not at once? Simply because at this present moment he

has only succeeded in convincing Brown and a small band of intimates of his dramatic genius. The rest will come in good time. He is young, and can afford to wait. He is just now playing at a small theatre in the suburbs for two pounds weekly. I will take him into our counsels, and let you know results. And now, ladies, I feel you must excuse me. You know I am not an idle man. You shall hear from me in a day or two.'

With renewed expressions of gratitude from the sisters, Algernon Brown took his leave. The door had scarcely closed upon their visitor, when Grace, drawing her chair close to Ethel, took both her hands, and looked intently into her face.

'And how long have you conceived this wonderful plan?'

Ethel blushed, and half smiling,—

'I have thought of it for days. And you know, Grace, I had great success in the *tableaux*,—had I not?'

‘Yes,’ replied Grace ; ‘but posing in a *tableau* and acting in a play are two very different things.’

‘And,’ continued Ethel, smiling, and shyly glancing in a console glass, which, placed between the windows, reflected her graceful figure at full length. I am not *quite* destitute of personal charms ; and I have always been given to understand *that* counts for a good deal.’

The eyes of Grace flashed approval, and taking the lovely face of her sister in both hands, she imprinted a hearty kiss on her cheek, as she answered,—

‘And so it does, darling. In some players it counts for everything !’





CHAPTER XI.

THE SPIAN.

SOME days elapsed ere Grace heard from Algernon Brown. But one morning the welcome rat-tat was heard at the street door, and Eliza laid upon the breakfast-table a letter addressed in the well-known hand. Hastily tearing open the envelope, Grace read as follows :—

‘DEAR MISS BEAUMONT,—I have been endeavouring to see Tom Richardson at his accustomed haunt, but have not as yet been successful. But last night I met Mrs. Carey (of whom you have no doubt heard) at an evening party, and I mentioned the fact that I was much interested in a young

lady who was very desirous of entering the dramatic profession. Although some years have elapsed since Mrs. Carey retired from the stage, she still possesses great influence in that world, and at all events is more qualified than any person with whom I am acquainted to advise you in the matter. Mrs. Carey will be very happy to see you any morning this week, between 11 and 12, if your sister is still in the same enthusiastic frame of mind as when I last had the pleasure of seeing her. You will no doubt make it convenient to call upon Mrs. Carey as soon as possible; and with every wish for Miss Ethel's success, believe me, my dear Miss Beaumont, yours sincerely,

ALGERNON BROWN.

‘*P.S.*—I enclose Mrs. Carey's address.’

The historical name of Mrs. Carey was of course familiar to both the sisters as belonging to the most celebrated of the actresses of the century. They had fre-

quently heard Mr. Beaumont dilate upon the charms of her Rosalind, the grace of her Mariana, and the power of her Julia. Therefore it was not without a certain degree of tremor that the sisters entered a cab on the following morning, and were driven to the address of Mrs. Carey, in one of the West-end squares.

They were duly ushered into the drawing-room, and waited with beating hearts her arrival. In a few moments the renowned actress entered the room. In spite of the time which had passed away since the public had been spectators of her impersonations, both Grace and Ethel were at once struck with the resemblance which Mrs. Carey still bore to the portraits of her in her principal characters.

The aquiline nose, the soft blue eye, the silver-toned voice, the beautiful enunciation, with which she requested the sisters to be seated, all realised the idea they had formed

from pictures and report of the great actress.

‘ I had some conversation with Mr. Brown on Tuesday last concerning your wish to become an actress. May I ask if you have ever performed in any play, either publicly or privately ? ’

Ethel replied that her attempts had been confined to private theatricals, and that only to a very limited extent.

After a pause of a few seconds, Mrs. Carey resumed,—

‘ I will not take up your time and my own in describing the difficulties and dangers of a theatrical life, more especially to a young lady, alone and unprotected, without any male relatives in the same profession to superintend her studies, and shield her from molestation and insult. I have always found such advice treated as superfluous and uncalled for ; but in the present case, as in all former ones, I must point out that it is not

possible to step from the drawing-room to the stage, as so many aspirants appear to imagine. To become a successful actor requires a long noviciate—years of study and practice—great natural talents, carefully cultivated—perseverance, and many other virtues too numerous to detail on the present occasion.’

As Mrs. Carey paused, Grace ventured to observe that the most celebrated comedian of our time, admitted on all sides to be without a rival in his own peculiar line, had accomplished this impossible feat, and had maintained his position unchallenged to the present day. Mrs. Carey smiled, and observed,—

‘That case is an exception, and we all know the exception proves the rule, and the actor you name had been for years an amateur of great celebrity. No, Miss Belmour, the best and only school is practice in (to use a vulgar but expressive phrase)

the "rough-and-tumble school,"—tumble on for anything. I am using a well-known phrase, young ladies, perfectly understood in the profession. *I* began with playing chambermaids, and I finished with playing "Lady Macbeth!"

The great actress glanced upwards as she spoke, and a shadow of regret appeared to pass across her features, but it was only for a moment, and the next instant she was the calm woman of the world,—the experienced actress advising youth on the dangers and difficulties of her profession.

‘The country has almost ceased to be a school for the London stage, but provincial practice would, of course, be indispensable ere you could dream of attempting an essay upon the London boards. I have interest with the manager of a theatre in the West of England, and as soon as the theatre opens, I will write to him concerning your application. I think I can say no more at present.’

Grace and Ethel rose, and thanked Mrs. Carey for her kindness, and withdrew. They pursued their walk home in silence for some minutes. At length Ethel, in a lachrymose tone, observed,—

‘It seems a very difficult thing to become an actress, Grace, does it not?’

‘Does your heart fail you, dear?’

Ethel made no reply, so Grace, in her usual cheery tone of voice, said,—

‘We will see this wonderful friend of Algernon Brown’s, Ethel, and hear what he has to say. For my part, I shall not be disappointed—certainly not surprised—if this dramatic plan of yours, Ethel, falls through and comes to nothing.’

Ethel stared in amazement at her sister’s speech. Grace continued,—

‘I did not wish to nip in the bud any scheme you had formed to assist in our plans of a livelihood, but I do not think you have sufficiently estimated the diffi-

culties of the course you have chosen to pursue.'

When they arrived at their lodgings, they were informed by the servant that two gentlemen were waiting to see them. On entering the sitting-room, Algernon Brown advanced to meet them, and proceeded to introduce his companion as Mr. Tom Richardson, a man of middle height, with dark hair, swarthy complexion, and expressive countenance; whose close-shaven cheeks, of a blueish tinge, betrayed the actor. He rose and bowed to the ladies, as Brown observed,—

'My friend, Mr. Tom Richardson, who is destined to inaugurate a new species of comedy, to found a new school of writing whose wit shall become proverbial, and—'

'Do not believe him, ladies,' interrupted the actor; 'I am at present only an adapter—a translator of French plays—and "your poor servant ever."' "

‘And what says the great Carey?’ inquired Brown.

Grace gave a brief epitome of what had taken place at the interview.

‘And what says Miss Ethel to this?’

Ethel was silent, but her face was eloquent of doubt and uncertainty, so Tom struck in with his proposal.

‘The plan I should advise is this:—I am about to take a benefit at the Regent Theatre. The piece is to be “Rob Roy.” I presume the young lady sings sufficiently well to enact the part of Diana Vernon. Miss Belmour would then obtain a peep behind the scenes of a regular theatre, as they really are,—would be able to form some opinion as to her nerve and capacity, and whether she would care to undergo the necessary toil and trouble requisite to obtain a position in the profession. Any instruction which might be necessary I should be happy to give; or my

mother or father, who are both in the cast.'

'Indeed,' said Brown, with a smile; 'quite a second edition of the Crummles family—eh! Tom?'

'Oh, as to that,' replied Tom, 'my sister also plays Mattie, servant to the Bailie. There is a rehearsal to-morrow, at eleven.'

'But I could not learn the part at so short a notice,' replied Ethel.

'Oh, as to that,' said Tom, 'you can use the book at the first rehearsal.'

So, after some further talk, it was decided that the Misses Belmour should appear at the rehearsal on the following day.

Punctually at the time appointed, the cab deposited them at the stage-door of the Regent Theatre, which entrance was situated in a narrow thoroughfare in rear of the theatre. The grimy-looking Cerberus conducted them through some dark passages,

up a wooden ladder, till at length they emerged upon the stage; at least that was the impression of Ethel, for the light was so dim that it was scarcely possible to distinguish the surrounding objects. By degrees, however, the auditorium became visible—the boxes, shrouded in dirty holland covers, and a small portion of daylight streaming in through the windows at the back of the gallery, which only served by contrast to increase the gloom which prevailed. A single gas jet was burning in the middle of the orchestra, where sat a man with a violin and the score on a desk before him. Several seedy-looking men, with close-shaven faces, stood in groups about the stage. At the wing were seated two or three young girls, busily engaged in needlework of some kind. The arrival of Grace and Ethel seemed to arouse a certain amount of curiosity, for the players gave sundry glances askant from beneath their

hats, which were worn either very much on one side, or over the eyebrows.

Tom led the way towards an old man who was talking to an elderly woman, and introduced them as his father and mother. They had both a careworn appearance, their habiliments were of the poorest, and there was a lack-lustre expression, especially in the eyes of the old man, which was the reverse of enlivening. A very pretty girl, about fifteen, was introduced as the daughter.

‘You will please to bear in mind, Miss Belmour, that you are for the nonce Diana Vernon. By that name only will you be spoken of, and summoned when wanted by the call-boy. My father, here, is Mr. Owen ; my mother, Helen Macgregor ; my sister, Mattie ; and your humble servant, Dougal. There will be no occasion to try the songs, at all events till the rehearsal is over, you can then, if you choose, and to test the power of your voice, sing them

over with the leader, whom you see yonder.'

The rehearsal then proceeded. Both the young ladies were much astonished at the absence of all acting on the part of the performers.

The men twirled their walking-sticks as they mumbled certain inarticulate sounds, occasionally speaking a word or two at the end of the speeches with extra distinctness, which, Tom told the ladies, were the cues. But they appeared to attach considerable importance to their actual positions on the stage, and sometimes repeated the walking and the crossings to and fro, stopping to make pencil memoranda in their play books or written parts, which most of them carried in their hands.

Tom superintended all this ; and when any difference of opinion occurred, his father would interpose, and remind them that he had played in this piece half-a-century ago,

when ‘ The Bailie ’ was represented by the celebrated Mackay, who had obtained the approval of the author of the novel, the great Sir Walter !

Ethel read the words of her part in a low voice, and was careful to mark her book with directions as to position, under the guidance of Tom Richardson.

Towards the close of the rehearsal, the pot-boy from a neighbouring tavern advanced to Tom, carrying a pewter measure of foaming beer, and waited patiently the while. Poor Tom felt first in one pocket and then in another for the requisite coin ; but in vain ! Ethel beckoned him towards her, and placing half-a-sovereign in his hand, said,—

‘ Mr. Brown told me that this payment would be necessary towards the expenses of your benefit. And as you do not appear to have change, pray allow me to discharge the claim now.’

The eyes of Tom Richardson flashed gratitude and joy as he received the money, and he then turned to the boy, and, in a haughty tone, supplemented his order, and tossed the half-sovereign to the modern Ganymede.

At the second rehearsal, Ethel was more perfect in the words of her part, and she had already received great praise from the conductor of the music as to her rendering of the incidental songs. The actors had also ceased to watch her with curious gaze. The poor, pale-faced girls were in their accustomed position at the wing, absorbed in their needlework, except when the requirements of the scene caused them for the moment to abandon their task.

Ethel remarked upon their industry in tones of surprise to Tom Richardson, as being an incident of a different character to what might be expected in girls of their class and pursuits.

Tom shook his head as he replied,—

‘ Ah, Miss Belmour, you have no doubt heard that the profession of the stage, and immorality and impropriety of conduct, are synonymous, are one and the same thing. But the impropriety comes to us ready made ; we do not go to the impropriety. That young girl yonder is the sole support of a grandmother and two younger brothers,—mere children. Her income is fifteen shillings a-week ! Finding existence impossible on such a sum, she has recourse to her needle as an extra source of income. She has been in the profession from childhood. Her father was a Clown, her mother a Columbine, and a better or more virtuous girl does not live. I will tell you a true story. A certain lady, whom we will call Miss A., drives up in her brougham one fine morning to the stage door of a certain theatre, and inquires for the manager or lessee, whom we will call Mr. B. Miss A. is very hand-

some and very rich. She wishes to come out, and is willing to pay £100, provided a new piece is written for her, and the talented lessee supports her in her performance with his talent. The bargain is ratified, and the lady, rich in gifts of beauty and assurance, achieves a certain success. Mr. B. subsequently borrows £500 of Miss A., which he intends to pay—when convenient. The character of Miss A. is tolerably well known in society, and the stage and the professors suffer in consequence. Ah! Miss Belmour, I am at present only an anonymous adapter from the French; but it is the dream of my life to write an *original* drama, in which the hero shall be a member of an aristocratic family, an officer in the army, and he shall become the husband of a *virtuous* ballet girl. And the audience shall not consider such an union absurd; on the contrary, their sympathies shall go entirely with the hero in his choice, notwithstanding

certain repulsive adjuncts, such as a drunken father, and so on !’

The countenance of Tom Richardson glowed with enthusiasm as he spoke these words, so that Ethel could not forbear clasping his hand as she replied,—

‘And I am sure, Mr. Richardson, your dream will be realised.’

The face of poor Tom had resumed its ordinary apathetic expression, and he only answered,—‘Ah, who can tell how hard it is to climb !’





CHAPTER XII.

‘ROB ROY MACGREGOR, O!’

IT was not without a sinking of the heart and an increased pulse that Ethel woke on the morning of the day which was to witness, before nightfall, her first appearance on a public stage! Could it be possible? A few short months ago, and she was the spoiled and petted daughter of a prosperous merchant living in opulence at Kensington; and now she and her sister were orphans, with scarcely five pounds in the world; and, excepting an occasional sale of a picture at the print-sellers in the Strand, nothing to stand between them and starvation, or the workhouse! Rely upon this, dear reader and critic, there is an

old saying, which we should always remember when we are tempted to animadvert in strong terms on the apparent want of self-respect on the part of those we have known in prosperity, and who have in vulgar parlance ‘Come down in the world.’ It is this, —‘We know what we are—we know not what we may be!’

The great master of human life has recorded that ‘man in his time plays many parts,’ and it was the destiny of Ethel to experience the truth of this axiom. The subject of her sole thoughts by day, and her dreams by night, was one, and one only—to devise some means whereby she could aid her sister in her endeavour to procure the necessaries of existence! To accomplish this she was ready to risk the chance of discovery, and the pitying remarks of former friends and acquaintances when that discovery was made. Her position, and the good name of her family, were already gone in the

estimation of society, through the defalcations, real or supposed, of her father, and a callous feeling had arisen within her breast—a spirit almost of defiance and contempt for the opinion of the world.

Excepting a short walk in the Regent's Park with her sister—which had been prescribed by Grace (who had observed the somewhat feverish condition of Ethel)—very little was done that day, except talking of the approaching event, and 'trying on' and altering the costumes of 'Diana Vernon.' At six o'clock the sisters started in a cab for the theatre, and at half-past six found themselves in the small dressing-room which had been allotted them by the kindness of the manager of the theatre.

Very lovely indeed did Ethel appear in her plaid silk open dress, with short, full sleeves and lace ruffles. Grace was seated at the end of the dressing-table, secretly worshipping the beauty of her sister, who

stood surveying herself in the glass, when a tap at the door, and the voice of Mrs. Richardson was heard requesting admittance. The eyes of the old lady gleamed approval and admiration.

‘Ah! very bonny, indeed—very bonny; but there is something wanting.’

Mrs. Richardson produced a box of rouge and some pearl powder. Both Grace and Ethel exclaimed and protested against such a proceeding; but on being assured that it was absolutely indispensable, that no complexion could withstand the effects of the side and foot gaslights, Ethel reluctantly consented, and Mrs. Richardson operated with a hare’s foot and a powder puff, and effected the necessary improvement. The voice of the call-boy was heard in the passage, announcing that the overture was ‘on,’ and then Ethel, with a beating heart, accompanied by Grace, made her way to the right wing of the stage.

It was with considerable difficulty that Ethel recognised the various characters of the drama. When a personage in a dark ringlet wig and breastplate advanced towards her, and introduced himself as her *pseudo* father, Sir Frederick Vernon, it was impossible to connect him with the fair, sandy, seedy-looking man at rehearsal. The familiar voice of dark, swarthy Tom Richardson proceeded from beneath a red wig; and the pale-faced, consumptive, dull-looking girls who figured so industriously at rehearsal, were transformed into blooming, lively, gay-looking lasses, very picturesque in their tartan and snoods.

But now the overture is at an end, and the voice of the stage manager is heard in one loud resonant word—*Clear!* Instantly the various characters, all who are not discovered at the rising of the curtain, flee from the stage; the prompter's bell rings, and the curtain rises.

The first scene seems scarcely to occupy a minute ; and the moment has now arrived when Ethel is to step from the wing, and appear in the full blaze of the footlights, exposed to the gaze and criticism of hundreds of strange eyes ! Leaning on the arm of her father the rubicon is crossed—some slight applause ensues, and Ethel utters the first words of her part with suitable emphasis and discretion—presently she ventures to raise her eyes, and scan the audience which is sitting in judgment on her efforts. The house is crowded to the roof ; but the entire mass of faces appear as through a mist, and this effect continues till the end of the performance—this effect being chiefly caused by the footlights which intervene between the performer and the audience.

It is her turn now to sing the duet with her lover, Francis Osbaldistone. As the prelude is being played, her heart seems filled with fresh courage, for Ethel was

always an accomplished musician. A tempest of applause succeeds her rendering of the song, mingled with the most piercing screams, or cat-calls as they are termed, from the gentlemen in the gallery, who are sitting in *al fresco* costume—voidless of coat, and with shirt-sleeves rolled up above the elbow. Ethel is met by Tom at the wing as she makes her exit, with a steaming glass of rum and water in his hand, which Ethel politely declines, and, accompanied by Grace, retires to her dressing-room, as she has a long wait, not being required till scene ii.

Act II.

Ethel sinks exhausted into an arm-chair, while Grace anxiously watches her troubled countenance. Presently Ethel clasps Grace to her heart, and sobs, as if her heart would break,—

‘O Grace, darling, I can never brook this degradation, for such I feel it. To be compelled to sing for the pleasure of the

passing hour of such beings as the audience of to-night, I could never endure it. Never, Grace !’

‘And yet you have been so successful, all the actors were saying, as I stood at the wing.’

‘Success ! No, Grace ; I am glad I have tried it. But this will not only be my *first* appearance, but my *last*.’

It is needless to detail the incidents of the evening. The players were civil and complimentary. The services of the pot-boy were in constant requisition for the players, increasing in a geometrical progression as the evening proceeded ; but they appeared entirely devoid of all enthusiasm for their art. No bricklayer’s labourer could go about his avocation in a more phlegmatic or stolid spirit than the representative of the bold outlaw, or the personator of the lover Francis, who was entirely ignorant of the first principles of acting, and had, in fact,

been selected from a local music-hall for his voice and capacity to sing the songs which belong to the character.

Occasionally the actors would complain of not getting 'a hand' at the usual points, or exult if they got 'a round' at an unusual part of the play; but this excitement was only momentary, and they speedily resumed their apathetic demeanour.

In about two hours the drama came to an end, and there was a rush to the several dressing-rooms, to prepare for a four-act melodrama, in addition to a farce, which was to complete the evening's entertainment.

Ethel and Grace shook Tom Richardson and the members of his family cordially by the hand, and, waiving the reply to the question as to their eventual intentions in a histrionic point of view, drove rapidly home in a cab to Camden Town.

Madame Casentini had some coffee prepared for the return of the sisters, and very

grateful did Ethel feel as she sat down in their humble lodgings, surrounded with her books and sketches, and peace and quiet, and with God's blessing on their efforts— independence! Smoothing back the hair from the burning forehead of Ethel, Grace, in a half-earnest half-jesting tone, said,—

‘And is this Miss Belmour's last appearance on any stage.’

‘The *very last*, darling,’ replied Diana Vernon.





CHAPTER XIII.

HOMWOOD.

ALGERNON BROWN was an early caller in Cardington Street on the morning succeeding the performance of ‘Rob Roy.’ Apologising for his seeming breach of etiquette, he explained it away by alleging his anxiety to learn the impression created on the sisters by the *debüt* of Ethel as a stage-player. He expressed no surprise at their fixed determination to abandon at once and for ever such a means of support.

‘Although,’ said Brown, ‘I must candidly own that your first attempt was most encouraging, and my opinion was shared by the whole of the company ; but, as you have

decided to give it up, I do not see any use in discussing the subject further. Anticipating such a result, I have a proposal to make, which you will of course accept or not, as you think proper. Among my oldest friends is a certain Miss Bagster. She is what is called 'an old maid,' very rich, and rather eccentric, but at the same time very good-natured and generous. Miss Bagster is in want of a companion, and thinking the post would suit Miss Ethel, I have ventured to talk the matter over with my friend, and she is so charmed with the description I have given, that the case may be considered as *un fait accompli*, merely awaiting your ratification of the bargain. Terms, one hundred a-year—duties, I presume, of the usual description—read to her, talk to her, and play on the pianoforte. Ah! Miss Ethel,' continued Brown, 'this is a changeable world. If anyone had prophesied a few short months ago that I should be negotiating

such a business as procuring the post of companion for the daughter of my old friend, I should have said the prophet was a false one! I need not point out the advantages of the arrangement. You will be in the enjoyment of every comfort—independent, and have the satisfaction of knowing that Grace has only one to provide for instead of two ; and that will be no difficult task if, as I understand, Mr. Jones is having a tolerable sale of the water-colours at an increased rate. To be, or not to be, Miss Ethel?’

‘I can only have one reply, dear friend,’ said Ethel. ‘I accept the post with gratitude, that is, if Miss Bagster is content with my services.’

‘Have no fear on that score. I am only sorry that my plan necessitates the separation of two sisters, and that thus you are deprived of mutual support ; but to-day is not always. When Miss Belmour has become famous on the walls of the Aca-

demy, you can then renew your companionship. Oh, by-the-bye, I presume you will prefer to continue the assumption of the name of Belmour ?’

‘ Ah! yes, decidedly.’

‘ I have spoken of you to Miss Bagster as the daughter of an old friend, and said I would prefer to have your decision as to the post before I mentioned your name, as you had, during the lifetime of your father, moved in very superior circles ; but really and truly I was in doubt as to your selection of a name. Well, now that matter is settled. How soon can you arrange to go ? The sooner the better.’

Ethel looked at Grace, and Grace looked at Ethel.

‘ Shall I write and say you will arrive to-morrow ?’

‘ Yes ; I think you may say so,’ replied Ethel. ‘ As I am in mourning, I shall not be much puzzled as to my selection of costumes.

‘Very well. Here is the address and full particulars as to the journey.’

Ethel read—‘Miss Bagster, Homewood,——shire.’

‘Then I will write at once to Miss Bagster, in order that she may be prepared to receive you. You will find either her brougham or a fly at the station ; and now good-bye. I shall take the liberty of calling occasionally on Grace to hear how you are getting on, as also your sister, and thus I shall, as the doctor said, who saw two patients in one house, “kill two birds with one stone.” Adieu.’

Neither of the sisters stirred from home that day, being reluctant, on the eve of perhaps a long separation, to spend a single hour elsewhere than in each other’s company. They had never been separated a single day since their birth, and both felt the trial as they contemplated the morrow. But ‘the inexorable logic’ of events left

them no choice. The source of income derivable from the sale of the sketches might fail them any day ; as the novel of 'Julia' was still, like the sentinel in 'All's Well,' going 'its lonely round' among the various publishers.

Madame Casentini heard the sad news with a considerable display of emotion, although her labours would be diminished one-half in the future, as Grace observed to her ; but as Madame Casentini remarked, 'it was as easy to cook two chops as one while you were about it ;' and both the ladies gave so little trouble. And Miss Belmour would surely miss her sister very much, etc.

So at twelve the following day Ethel took her place in the train at the Great Eastern Railway Station, one modest trunk constituting her only luggage. The excitement of the journey and the anticipation of change and novelty sustained

Ethel's spirits in a marvellous manner, and it was with a smiling, blooming face that Ethel kissed her adieu to Grace, who watched the fast receding red light in rear of the train with a desolation of spirit and a sinking of the heart for which she was perfectly unprepared. But it was on reaching her lodgings in Cardington Street that the exceeding bitterness of the separation was fully realised.

A drizzling rain was falling, and the cheerless aspect of the apartments, with the fire almost extinct in the grate ; the empty chair of Ethel ; a novel lying on the table, with the last read page carefully recorded, all combined to strike a chill to the heart of Grace, which an eternal separation could hardly have increased. Then came the recollection of the hopes and fears of the last few months ; the visits to the picture-dealer ; the correspondence with the publishers ; the episode of the dramatic

venture ; and that pleasant hour at the close of each day, when, no matter what had been the bitter disappointments thereof, they found themselves seated at their pleasant, bright little supper table, and talked over the struggles of the past, and planned and wove bright visions of the future.

Now, the future appeared void of all romance. Ethel would spend her days as a companion to a crotchety old lady, and she herself would eke out a precarious subsistence as a painter of sketches for the dealers. With no relative to love ; no friend to consult ; no companion with whom to exchange words of sympathy. Her former life at Kensington appeared to be part and parcel of another life—another world. So much had happened since, that it was scarcely conceivable that it had all occurred in less than one short year.

Here we take leave of Grace for some time, our duty as faithful historians being to follow the fortunes of Ethel.

Ethel was the only passenger who alighted at the station, so that the servant in livery who was waiting had no difficulty in deciding who was Miss Belmour. He advanced, and touching his hat, mentioned her name, and said Miss Bagster had sent the brougham to convey her to Homewood. Placing her trunk on his shoulder, he led the way through the booking office, and in a few seconds Ethel was driving at a brisk pace to her new home. And very pleasant Ethel found it, after being accustomed to omnibuses and frowsy cabs. The softly padded cushions, the quick pace ; the absence of any anxiety as to the amount of cost at the end of the journey, were Ethel's first pleasant experiences of her new life. In less than half - an - hour the brougham stopped at a gate, which, being opened by

a servant, they drove up to the door of a large red brick, irregular-shaped house, overgrown with ivy and creeping plants.

Ushered by the servant across a large hall into the drawing-room, Ethel beheld a very stout lady, about fifty-five years of age, advancing to meet her, whom she rightly conjectured to be Miss Bagster.

‘How do you do, my dear? I will ring the bell for Parker, and she will show you your rooms; and I daresay you would like a cup of tea? I will order some tea to be taken upstairs. We don’t dine till six. There, my dear; don’t stay now. We will have a talk about everything when you come downstairs.’

Almost exerting a gentle pressure with her hands, Miss Bagster rang the bell, and Ethel followed a spruce lady’s maid to the rooms allotted to her. And very charming rooms Ethel was fain to confess they were. An exquisite boudoir of a sitting-room, with

an ebony pianoforte, and some hanging shelves well supplied with books of a cheerful and enlivening tendency; the bed-chamber with its snow-white hangings; choice engravings on the walls, and a bouquet of freshly-cut roses on the dressing table—diffusing a delicious perfume—was a nest fit for a princess.

As Ethel sipped the tea which had been brought by Parker, reclining, as she did so, in the most luxurious of arm-chairs, she could not help contrasting the scene around her with the lodgings she had left that morning in Camden Town. For a moment the image of Grace, alone, isolated, rose before her mental vision, and a tear came unprompted to her eye. The keen appreciation which Ethel experienced of these luxuries did not arise because she had not been accustomed to them, but because she *had*; it was the *return* to her former way of life which constituted the charm, which made

the fascination in which her sensuous nature was steeped—insomuch that she wondered how her recent existence had been endurable, and how cheerfulness or contentment could ever have been a guest under such a condition of things.

Suddenly remembering that in this earthly paradise she was merely a hired servitor, she hastily unpacked her trunk, and was about to descend to the drawing-room, when Parker appeared, after a preliminary tap at the door, with a message from Miss Bagster, that if Miss Belmour felt so disposed she need not appear till the dinner hour, which would be in an hour's time.

Ethel felt grateful for this boon, and seized the opportunity to write a few lines to her sister, announcing her safe arrival.

A few minutes before six Ethel descended to the drawing-room, arrayed in slight mourning, consisting of a white dress trimmed with black ribbons. Never had

Ethel looked more lovely, and Miss Bagster gave an approving glance of admiration as she introduced an elderly gentleman, of about sixty years of age, as Mr. Ramsay, who forthwith proceeded to lead Miss Bagster to the dining-room, followed by Ethel.

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Mr. John Ramsay was a Scotchman, the owner of a considerable estate in the neighbourhood, and the occupier of a house called the 'Grange.' He was now, therefore, a landed proprietor, and 'lived at home at ease,'—but such had not always been his good fortune. As to what he *had* been, it was difficult to say what he had *not* been. He had been a merchant, a banker, a political adventurer and electioneering agent, a farmer and a gold-digger, both in California and Australia. To do him justice, he never attempted to conceal the vicissitudes of which he had been the subject, and was fond of relating how he had slept for weeks

in a tent at San Francisco, with a six-shooter under his pillow, surrounded by the most reckless desperadoes the world ever saw ; how he had been the confidential adviser of the Finance Minister at Paris during the Republic in 1848 ; how, as a political agent, he had been brought in contact with many of the celebrities in the English Parliament ; how he had run through two fortunes, and been reduced to the direst poverty.

On the walls of the ‘ Grange ’ hung an oil-painting of a sailing vessel, which he had twice, as a captain and owner, navigated round the world. He had been a handsome man in his youth, and still showed traces in the well-cut features and dark, expressive eye, of the handsome Jack Ramsay who had, at one-and-twenty, won the heart and hand of ‘ the belle of the Lothians,’ Miss M‘Alister ; and secondly, in more mature age, Miss Higgins, the City heiress.

He was now a widower and childless, and had derived no pecuniary benefit from his second marriage, as the fortune of Miss Higgins had remained under her sole control, and had returned to her own relatives at her death. Such was the individual with whom Ethel now found herself associated at the table of Miss Bagster. Mr. Ramsay addressed his conversation almost entirely to his hostess, and, consisting as it did of anecdotes and reminiscences of his varied career, which seemed to afford much amusement to Miss Bagster, as indeed it did to Ethel, the circumstance was not one which caused her much regret. At length, directing a keen glance at Ethel, he remarked,—

‘ I think I understood from Miss Bagster that your late father was a City merchant. I confess I do not recollect the name of Belmour ; to be sure it is some years now since I mixed in City circles—was he in the Russia trade ? ’

Ethel was overwhelmed with confusion as she replied,—

‘No ; papa’s business was chiefly with Spain.’

Miss Bagster directed a pitying glance at Ethel.

‘It is only a few months since Miss Belmour lost her father.’

Mr. Ramsay hastened to apologise, changed the conversation, and hoped that he should after dinner have the pleasure of hearing Miss Belmour play on the pianoforte.

‘Do you play Mendelssohn. Have you any of those charming “Lieder ohne Worte?”’

Ethel blushing replied that she could play any ordinary music at sight, and that Mendelssohn was an especial favourite with her, which seemed to rejoice Mr. Ramsay very much.

‘Never mind Wagner’s sneer about the divine Mendelssohn, Miss Belmour. Let

the music of the future be relegated *to* the *future*. It is with the present *we* have to deal.'

Mr. Ramsay now rose and opened the door for the ladies, having observed the telegraphic signal customary on such occasions proceed from Miss Bagster to her companion, and they left him to sip his '34 port in quiet. As soon as they were seated, Miss Bagster turned to Ethel and said,—

'Well, my dear, and how do you like Mr. Ramsay? Isn't he charming, the most amusing of men? He usually dines here two or three times a week. I keep very little company, and I am afraid you will find it very dull. I know I have plenty of enemies on this account; but I don't care about that. If I can't have amusing people about me, I don't care to have any. *I* am never dull. I can always fall back on my books. Ah! my dear, if every one led the life they liked, what a different world this would be!

Instead of which, nine-tenths of humanity imitate the remaining tenth, like a flock of sheep, and undergo tortures unspeakable, although they hardly confess the fact to themselves because of tyrant custom! When I was in London this season, I went to a small and early affair,—a carpet dance. The house would have accommodated fifty comfortably. There were nearly two hundred invited, and one hundred and fifty came. The result, as you may guess, was unalloyed misery and discomfort, both of body and mind. The ladies sat at the supper table by themselves, the intervening space between them and the wall occupied by a mob of attendant cavaliers, who, as they handed all the delicacies of the season, appeared half famishing, the supper being served two hours too late, according to rule, and among them I observed the Honourable Mortimer Sydney, in the attitude of the letter S., screwed up against the wall, with

his feet in the fender, and his elbow in dangerous proximity to a column of plates which had done service, and were piled up like the leaning tower of Pisa on the mantel shelf. And when I met him two days afterwards, he went into raptures with the whole affair ! And yet I do not charge him with hypocrisy. I really believe he believed all he said ! But I have not spoken to you about yourself.'

Miss Bagster here made all the necessary inquiries as to the comfort of Ethel, and spoke in high terms of Algernon Brown, whom she termed the modern Samaritan, and expressed great sympathy with Grace under her separation from her sister.

' But, my dear, we will have her down on a visit in a few weeks. Oh, here comes Mr. Ramsay.'

After coffee had been served, Ethel played on the pianoforte, and both Miss Bagster and Mr. Ramsay seemed equally

delighted with the efforts of the lovely performer. Soon after nine Mr. Ramsay took his departure, and Ethel yielded to the advice of Miss Bagster, and sought the solitude of her chamber, to find in sleep renewed strength and health for her life at Homewood.





CHAPTER XIV.

AN OLD FRIEND.

DURING the next fortnight nothing occurred worthy of record in the life of Ethel. Her days passed in a consistent uniformity—a routine of domestic duties and ornamental companionship to Miss Bagster. No one except the vicar had crossed the threshold of Homewood since her arrival, and Ethel several times found herself on the point of confessing that her life promised but a dull future, till checked by the reflection that her heart ought to be full of gratitude to Providence for having rescued her from the anxiety and sordid cares of her former life at Camden Town.

Grace had written several times in a tone meant to be cheerful, but Ethel thought she could detect a depression which, in spite of her efforts, her sister was unable to conceal. Miss Bagster was kind, but her spirits were very variable, and subject to sudden changes—volatile and excitable at one time, succeeded by fits of melancholy. Mr. Ramsay was a frequent visitor, and had it not been for his amusing, yet caustic, views of men and things, life at Homewood would certainly have fallen under the denomination of *triste*.

Occasionally Miss Bagster would drive out in a pony carriage, accompanied by Ethel, who could not help remarking on the singularly flat and uninteresting nature of the scenery in the neighbourhood of Homewood. Miss Bagster replied,—

‘ I admire you, my dear, for your candour. I agree with you entirely, but it was precisely on that account I selected Homewood

as my permanent residence. Any place within fifty miles of London, possessed of railway communication, may be considered a suburb of the metropolis, and in this locality, thank goodness, there is no likelihood of our seclusion being invaded by an enterprising builder, or droves of vulgar excursionists.'

Ethel chanced one evening to enter the drawing-room dressed for dinner, and knowing that Miss Bagster had not yet completed the mysteries of her toilet, contemplated having a delicious quarter of an hour in the perusal of volume three of the novel of the day, when she became conscious that she was not the sole occupant of the drawing-rooms. At the further end of the second drawing-room stood a gentleman, apparently absorbed in the contemplation of a Turner, or at all events of a picture which passed for a veritable specimen of that great master. Hearing the *frou-frou* of her dress, he turned

round, and uttered an exclamation of surprise. It was George Lawson !

‘ Is it possible ? can it really be Miss Beaumont ? I mean Miss Ethel.’

Ethel advanced, and accepting his outstretched hand, said, in a hurried tone of voice,—

‘ I am known here only as Miss Belmour. Pray, Mr. Lawson, let us meet as strangers. I cannot tell you more at present. I hear Miss Bagster’s foot on the stairs.’

Scarcely had Ethel resumed her seat on the *causcuse* at the end of the room when Miss Bagster made her appearance. Her surprise was almost as great as that of Mr. Lawson, but she advanced and shook him warmly by the hand.

‘ Very glad to see you, Mr. Lawson ; but why did you not drop a line to notify your visit, and I would then have made all necessary preparations — have killed the fatted calf and all ? ’

Mr. Lawson, in his meekest tones, apologised for his unexpected appearance ; but business of importance had prompted his sudden arrival, which he would explain at Miss Bagster's leisure, and that Homewood always abounded with the good things of this life ; and last, but not least, with a warm welcome to all friends and visitors.

Miss Bagster, perceiving Ethel, exclaimed,—

‘Why, bless me, there is Ethel. How very awkward for you both. This young lady is Miss Ethel Belmour, who is kind enough to devote her time and abilities to cheering the lonely life of an old maiden lady. Ethel, this is Mr. Lawson, an old friend of mine, and my confidential adviser in all matters of business.’

Ethel rose and curtsied, and Mr. Lawson bowed with an air of profound respect and subservience.

The entrance of Mr. Ramsay at this

juncture prevented the embarrassment of Ethel being perceived by the lynx-like eyes of Miss Bagster. The gentlemen shook hands, and were evidently old friends.

Dinner being announced, Mr. Ramsay led Miss Bagster to the dining-room, and Lawson escorted Ethel. It all seemed like a dream to her! Three weeks ago she was rehearsing on the stage of a minor theatre, and sharing with Grace two rooms as her residence in a small street in Camden Town.

Now she was living in a well-appointed country house, seated at a table loaded with all the delicacies of the season (as a reporter would describe it), with Lawson as her *vis-à-vis*, and on familiar terms with the two individuals who sat on her right and left hand, of whose very existence she was not cognisant three short weeks ago. Lawson almost seemed to share her feelings, so unexpected had been the meeting, and gazed

at Ethel occasionally, as if he could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses.

Mr. Ramsay did the lion's share of talk as usual, and by the time the *entrées* were under requisition, Lawson had recovered his self-possession, and contributed his share of conversation in his customary intelligent manner. Ethel scarcely spoke, and so felt relieved when the refuge of the drawing-room was attained, where she could smile and assume an interest in the chatter of Miss Bagster, who was in one of her loquacious moods this evening.

To understand what follows, it is necessary that the reader should be informed that between the drawing and the dining-rooms, a small chamber intervened, which went by the name of the library, although it was rather a stretch of terms so to designate it, the number of books not being very considerable.

But in consequence of this arrangement,

the masculine element had free scope to indulge in the talk men love, without fear of disturbing the subdued nothings of the feminine element in the drawing-room. There being no room appropriated for smoking, and Miss Bagster being well known to have no objection to the dining-room being used for that purpose, both the gentlemen proceeded to light a Partagas, and, with some choice Chateau-Margaux before them, presented a picture of decided enjoyment.

Mr. Ramsay was the first to speak.

‘Your visit this evening was not expected by Miss Bagster?’

‘No, I shall require a couple of hours’ private chat with our hostess some time to-morrow; in fact I may have to stay a day or two.’

‘Indeed!’ rejoined Ramsay; ‘your business must indeed be important. I suppose you have a confidential and trustworthy repre-

sentative to look after your interests in town ?’

‘Oh, yes ; Simpson is all right in that respect.’

After a pause, Ramsay resumed,—

‘Would you consider that I am taking a liberty, as an old friend of Miss Bagster’s, if I inquired the nature of your business with that lady ?’

Lawson removed the cigar from his lips, in undisguised astonishment.

‘My dear sir, the confidence reposed in a solicitor is almost of as sacred a nature as that uttered under the seal of the confessional !’

Mr. Ramsay mused for a moment.

‘Can you keep a secret ?’

‘I think I have this moment given you a proof of my powers in that respect,’ replied Lawson.

‘It is an event which may be classed in the category of the probable, that my rela-

tions with Miss Bagster may assume a more intimate character than they at present possess,' observed Ramsay.

'I half suspected as much, but I could not divulge a confidence without the permission of the lady herself.'

Again Mr. Ramsay mused as he puffed his cigar.

'Mr. Lawson, I am going to be candid and explicit; it will save time to us both. You have been unfortunate on the turf lately!'

Lawson rose from his seat, his countenance assuming a cadaverous hue, almost as white as the damask cloth on the table before him.

'You lost five thousand pounds at Newmarket last month. You were unable to settle the claim on the Monday following. You gave bills at three months. I hold the bulk of the paper. I will renew those bills when they become due, provided you

acquaint me with the nature of the business about which you have to consult Miss Bagster. I have my suspicions. I merely want to know if those suspicions will be confirmed by you. I can assure you, Mr. Lawson, I do not speak thus in any unfriendly spirit. And, should you accede to my request, I will endeavour to put in your way a very important agency which I have it in my power to place at your disposal.'

Lawson had resumed his seat, and it was in very altered tones that he now replied to Mr. Ramsay.

'As you say that in a short time your interests may be identical with those of Miss Bagster, perhaps I am not guilty of a breach of confidence if I inform you that my presence here is connected with a mortgage!'

'A mortgage!—impossible! Miss Bagster in want of money!' exclaimed Ramsay.

'Perhaps you are not aware that the bulk

of Miss Bagster's income arises from the profits of an indigo plantation in the Indies, not far from Agra,' said Lawson. 'You probably *do* know that there has been a deplorable failure of the crop during the present year, and this, combined with heavy losses in South American stocks, has seriously inconvenienced her, and I am negotiating a mortgage on some property which she possesses in this neighbourhood. Of course things may all come round in time, but at present there is no alternative but the course I have named.'

Mr. Ramsay seemed lost in thought, and made no reply.

'May I inquire, Mr. Ramsay, how you have discovered, not only that I have been unfortunate at Newmarket, but that I have any transactions of a turf nature? I do not wish to deny that I have endeavoured to conceal the last fact quite as much as I have hoped to hide the former, as it would militate

most seriously against my professional prospects—so much so, that, had Nancy won, I fully intended to give up racing altogether; but the fates, or the ring, willed it otherwise.’

‘I have heard it stated, in more than one quarter,’ said Ramsay, ‘that you were the owner of the celebrated mare Nancy; the fact of your losses was an accidental discovery. But rely upon this, Mr. Lawson, that in this Argus age *everything* is known. I was not aware, for instance, that you had the least suspicion of my intentions with respect to Miss Bagster. But there, we will close the discussion, and with your consent join the ladies in the drawing-room.’

As Lawson perceived it was useless to press Ramsay further, he rose and followed him accordingly. They found Ethel at the piano, playing a concerto of Hummel’s, and Miss Bagster rapt in admiration as she contemplated the beautiful performer. Not-

withstanding, the arrival of the masculine portion of the community exercised the enlivening influence which is always witnessed when the gentlemen 'drop in' from the dining-room, and introduce a greater diversity of topics than can ever be found when the company consists of women alone. But on this occasion the masculines seemed under the influence of some spell, for Mr. Ramsay was very silent, and all his usual small-talk seemed to have departed, and Lawson answered *mal apropos* to the observations addressed to him both by his hostess and the fair Ethel. Finally, Mr. Ramsay left sooner than usual, jestingly observing that he knew Miss Bagster was anxious to have some chat as quickly as possible with Mr. George Lawson; and Ethel pleaded a headache, and retired early, thus leaving Lawson to consult with Miss Bagster on the important business which had caused his unexpected visit to Homewood.



CHAPTER XV.

THE LAST APPEAL.

ETHEL was astir with the lark the following morning, and took advantage of a brilliant October sun to make a short promenade before breakfast in the grounds of Homewood. The garden was a very extensive one, and was kept by Miss Bagster in the most perfect condition, no expense being spared to render it a model of arrangement and beauty to all the country round. The fresh, exhilarating morning air was not without its natural influence on the youthful mind of Ethel, which seemed imbued with a cheerfulness to which it had for many months been a stranger. Ethel had proceeded to the extremity of the

grounds, and was gazing across the flat country, from which the distant autumnal mists were being dispelled by the rays of the morning sun, when the voice of Lawson fell upon her ear,—

‘Ethel, dear Ethel! surely it was more than chance that brought you to Homewood, to gladden my eyes again with your presence! Tell me of yourself—above all—tell me if I may still hope.’

He had taken her hand, and ere she could withdraw it, Ethel looked him in the face, and spite of herself, was startled at the change which a few months had wrought in his features. The very expression was altered.

This had not been so apparent on the preceding evening, when Ethel had seen him flushed with the excitement of meeting her again, and so unexpectedly; and the light of the evening lamp is not such a tell-tale as the light of the sun on a bright October morning. And there was another circum-

stance, which was, of course, unknown to Ethel—the discovery and announcement by Ramsay the previous evening of the pursuits and losses of Lawson in connection with the turf—and which discovery had not tended to shed a balmy influence on the slumbers of Lawson during the night which succeeded. So that a feeling almost of pity entered the breast of Ethel, and she did not withdraw her hand, but let it remain in his grateful clasp. For Ethel had never shared the worst suspicion which her sister had entertained regarding him in connection with the death of Mr. Beaumont.

‘Have you been ill? You are much altered!’ said Ethel in sympathetic tones.

‘I have suffered much,’ replied Lawson. ‘I should have been more or less than man if I had allowed the dreadful charge brought against me by your sister, to pass by me as the idle wind which I regard not; but let us not speak of that. *You*, at all events, do

not believe me guilty ; that would have been more than I could bear. Your sister—I bear her no ill will—she is well, I trust ? And you—forgive me for saying it—I find in the position of a dependent—doomed to bear with the caprices of a mistress—’

Ethel withdrew her hand.

‘ I have experienced nothing but kindness from Miss Bagster—and now I am independent—and not, as I was a few weeks ago, dependent on my sister’s exertions for the bread I ate, and the roof which sheltered me—’

‘ Forgive me, Ethel ; but my pride suffers a pang when I behold the daughter of Mr. Beaumont in a position like that you at present occupy, and from which it would be my pride and my joy to rescue you. Even Grace would acknowledge the unselfishness of my love for you ; when I tender, as I do now, the devotion of a life, and my heart’s entire affection. I lay them bot

at your feet, Ethel. It is for you to decide.'

As Ethel paused, agitated beyond measure by the impassioned appeal of Lawson—he perceived, or imagined that he did so—that her sense of pity had been aroused by his careworn and altered appearance, and, remembering the old proverb, that 'Pity is akin to Love,' he resolved to work upon her sympathy still further, and detail, to a certain extent, a portion of his mental anxieties.

'True, dear Ethel; that my worldly position is in a measure different to what it was when I told you I loved you in the spring of this year. Through the dishonesty of some of my clients I have sustained heavy losses—many thousands; but I have still the brain which acquired those thousands, and with God's help I will struggle till I achieve that position you are so well fitted to adorn; and with

you as my companion in those efforts, they are certain to be crowned with success.'

Lawson advanced and endeavoured to take her hand again ; but Ethel, gathering her scarf round her, suggested a return to the house, as it was already past the breakfast hour, and reminded Lawson, with a smile, that she was not a visitor at Homewood, but a paid servitor. Lawson acquiesced, with a horrid suspicion that his latter speech had better have been left unsaid. But who can fathom the mysteries of a woman's heart !

Fortunately Miss Bagster had not yet appeared, being too fatigued with the late and lengthy discussion with her solicitor on the previous evening on the question of the mortgage.

Breakfast over, Ethel communed with herself on the state of her heart in the solitude of her chamber. Did she love George Lawson ? Interested ? Yes. It

was a pleasure to her to hear him pouring out his tale of love. She would miss him when he took his departure from Homewood. How much!—it would have gratified him to learn. He had had great losses—was probably a poor man for his position in life—perhaps in debt.

Ethel shuddered.

Marry a man in debt! with the recollection of the days of poverty spent in Cardington Street. Never! A picture of her life as the wife of a man struggling with poverty and embarrassment rose before her with all its humiliations and its sordid economies. Better to live and die at Homewood as the companion of Miss Bagster, with all her fluctuations of temper; better to lead a life devoid, perhaps, of happiness, but devoid also of that misery which was certain to be the result of an union with Lawson.

Ethel resolved that there should not be

any repetition of a scene similar to that of the morning, and sat down and penned the following brief note :—

‘DEAR MR. LAWSON,—If you have any real regard for me, I must ask you to abandon any idea you may have entertained, that my decision with respect to your proposal this morning can be other than a negative.—Believe me, dear Mr. Lawson, yours faithfully,

‘ETHEL BELMOUR.’

After some cogitation as to the mode of conveying the missive, Ethel resolved to adopt the ordinary course, and send it by the hand of the servant in the house. It might have reference to a commission to be executed in London. Were she to give Lawson the letter with her own hand, it would have to be done when she was alone with him, and Ethel was very anxious

not to find herself in that position again ; so, ringing the bell, she requested the servant to give the note to Mr. Lawson.

‘ Do you know when Mr. Lawson leaves for town ? ’

‘ He is just going, Miss. He is in the ’all now. Is there any answer, Miss ? ’

‘ No.’

Ethel repented that she had not directed the letter to the Temple ; but it was too late now. Miss Bagster would probably be cognisant of the note ; but there was no help for it. The sound of the wheels of the brougham on the gravel told her he had already taken his departure.

.
Three months had elapsed since the visit of Lawson. It was now the end of January ; and Ethel was returning to Homewood, from the village, where she had been executing some commissions for Miss Bagster, when she fancied she heard a footstep im-

mediately behind her ; she turned, but could see no one. Her path lay through a thick wood, and the bare branches of the trees were silvered with the rime of a white frost. The cold was intense ; but the temperature only served to increase the healthy colour on her cheek ; and never had she looked more lovely, as she stood with parted lips, and blooming face, set off by the black lynx boa around her neck, which acted like a frame of ebony to the beautiful features. She stood—a model for a sculptor—the embodiment of attention ! Again she resumed her walk—the beating of her heart being distinctly perceptible to herself, as she increased her pace. The path made a circuitous bend ; but there was no alternative but to follow its course, as the trees were so thickly planted, and mingled with brushwood, that a short cut was almost impossible—at all events, to a member of the gentler sex. Ethel was congratulating her-

self on nearing the end of her journey, when another sudden bend of the path brought her face to face with Lawson. He was very pale, and his face wore a stern, subdued expression, which boded no pleasant interview.

‘Ethel, I have come to see you for the last time, to ask you once more to be my wife. I have tried my hardest to drive your image from my thoughts, the recollections of your voice from my memory, but in vain. Life is valueless without your companionship—a weary desert, unblest by a single oasis,—without hope,—without a solitary joy. As I speak, you seem to listen with pleasure to my heart’s utterances, then there suddenly seems to arise a barrier between us which nothing can surmount—and you are as stern and implacable as fate ! Is there any engagement between you and Mr. Gordon ? You will say I have no right to ask the question—perhaps not—but your poor father told me that Gordon loved you,

and intended to make you his wife. If such be the case, my lips shall never, from this moment, utter one word of love !’

‘ Mr. Lawson, there never has been—there never will be any engagement between Mr. Gordon and myself. You must not press me more.’

The face of Lawson gleamed with a bright and sudden joy, as this apprehension was thus swept from his brain. He endeavoured to take her hand, to draw her towards him ; but with blanched face, from which all colour had fled, Ethel spoke, and as she did so, the words sank into his heart with an icy conviction, which left no particle of hope behind.

‘ George Lawson, what you ask can never be. *It is impossible !* Farewell.’

She passed on and left him where he stood, watching her retreating figure till it was hid from view by the plantation. Then, as if adopting a sudden resolution, he turned and strode rapidly in the direction of Home-

wood. He was ushered into the drawing-room, where he found Miss Bagster alone, engaged in reading. He threw himself wearily into a chair as Miss Bagster inquired if he had enjoyed his stroll.

‘Capital walking weather,’ replied Lawson. ‘By-the-bye, I met Ethel in the wood. I think she grows prettier every day. I thought any improvement was scarcely possible, when I saw her in October last.’

‘Ethel!’ exclaimed Miss Bagster; ‘anyone would suppose you were old friends.’

Lawson blushed, or endeavoured to do so, and assumed an air of embarrassment.

‘And,’ continued Miss Bagster, ‘now I remember that her last act on your leaving here in October was to write you a letter. I am not at all inquisitive, Mr. Lawson, but my companion is very young, and I consider myself in a measure responsible for her happiness and welfare. Have you ever met before?’

Lawson paused, and with a very creditable assumption of confusion, replied in hesitating tones—

‘It is that which troubles me, my dear Miss Bagster. I feel I have to some extent been guilty of deception towards you, but I can assure you my sole motive was to benefit the young lady herself. Indeed, it was at her request that I concealed from you certain facts concerning her and her family.’

The face of Miss Bagster became very flushed, and it was with considerable asperity that she replied,—

‘I must insist, Mr. Lawson, that you instantly inform me of all you know about this girl.’

‘On one condition, Miss Bagster, and one condition only,—that you, under no possible circumstances, give up my name as your informant.’

‘I promise,’ replied Miss Bagster.

‘I am on my way to the Grange, as you

know, and when I met Miss Ethel in the wood, she was not aware I had already called here, and before her return I shall have taken my departure.'

'Well, proceed,' impatiently exclaimed Miss Bagster.

'In the first place, her name is not Belmour.'

'Not Belmour!'

'Her real name is Beaumont,' said Lawson.

'Beaumont! Beaumont! where have I heard that name?'

'You remember that case in the spring of last year, when the well-known merchant disappeared so mysteriously.'

'What! that notorious swindler! that man who cheated so many people out of their savings, and then added the crime of suicide to his other offences?'

'The same,' quietly replied Lawson.

Miss Bagster rose from her seat, and walked towards the window in great agita-

tion, and stood with her back to Lawson, as she gazed upon the wintry scene without. The lawyer watching her with his light-blue eyes and acid smile, as the spider may be supposed to watch the fly which is about to enter the web which it has carefully spun for its destruction.

‘To be sure,’ resumed Miss Bagster in a calmer tone, ‘the poor girl herself cannot be held responsible for the faults of her father ; but why this deceit ? I cannot bear deception !’ and Miss Bagster again paced the room in great excitement.

Suddenly pausing in her march,—‘Do you suppose that Algernon Brown knew all this ?’

Lawson held up his hand, and shook his head with a deprecating smile.

‘Nay, Miss Bagster, if Mr. Brown had a hand in the matter, I am not surprised at anything !’

‘Come, come, Mr. Lawson, I won’t hear

a word against Algernon Brown. No doubt he can explain his share in the business when called upon,' replied Miss Bagster.

Mr. Lawson made a mental memorandum never to attack Mr. Brown again in the presence of Miss Bagster.

'There is Ethel; I hear the gate bell. 'If you do not wish to appear in this affair, you had better make your exit through the library.'

Mr. Lawson seized his hat and left the drawing-room, but halted in the library, and took up a position as near the door by which he had escaped as possible, in order to possess himself of all which passed in the adjoining room. Ethel presently made her appearance, and related the history of her visit to the village, and the commissions with which she had been charged.

'Have you seen any one,—any of our friends?' inquired Miss Bagster, in as careless a tone as she could assume, although

her fingers trembled with excitement as they examined the wools and purchases which Ethel had made. After the slightest perceptible pause, Ethel replied,—

‘I met Mr. Lawson in the wood.’

‘Mr. Lawson!’

‘Ah! I suppose he was on his way to the Grange. I wonder he did not call here as he was in the neighbourhood.’

Ethel busied herself with her purchases, her face crimsoned with blushes as she did so.

‘I have a great regard for Mr. Lawson,’ pursued Miss Bagster, ‘he is so truthful, so free from deceit. I can forgive anything but deceit. I hope, my dear Ethel, *you* will never be led by any temptations to attempt any deception?’

The countenance of Ethel became pale and red by turns.

‘Have you ever found me attempting deceit, Miss Bagster?’

‘N—no; but I must say you have not been very explicit as to your parents—your former abode—I mean when your father was alive.’

‘I thought Mr. Brown had told you all that was necessary,’ replied Ethel, her heart full of strange forebodings and anticipations of evil.

‘Miss Belmour, I never was an actress, and never could be one. I must ask you one or two questions. Will you promise to answer me truthfully and honestly?’

With a face as pale as marble, Ethel replied,—

‘I promise!’

‘Is—your—name—Belmour?’

In a tone worthy of Astarte came the words, ‘*It is not!*’

Again came the question from the lips of Miss Bagster, ‘*Is your name Beaumont?*’

Ethel rose from her seat, and, after a pause of some seconds, replied, ‘*It is not!*’

Miss Bagster clung to the arms of the chair in which she was seated, and gazed at Ethel in speechless amazement.

‘It *was* my name, mine no longer! My name is now *Ramsay*. I was married to Mr. John Ramsay, in London, by special licence three weeks ago!’

END OF VOL. I.

G R A C E.

VOL. II.

a

G R A C E

A NOVEL

BY

HENRY TURNER

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II.

TINSLEY BROTHERS
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G R A C E.



CHAPTER I.

THE BENEDICT.

‘**A**LGERNON!’

‘My dear!’

‘Do for goodness’ sake put down that horrid paper! I thought you always saw all the papers at the club.’

The speaker was Mrs. Algernon Brown, *née* Caroline Dawson, now the wife of our old friend, the eminent *littérateur*, and her marriage was a brilliant illustration of the re-

sults of persistent and well-directed perseverance.

They were seated at breakfast, this fine April morning, in their commodious and well-furnished house in Leinster Square. Mrs. Brown is very little changed since we last saw her, although it is now more than three years since the party at Kensington, on which occasion she figured as one of the Four Maries, in the *tableaux vivans*, which preceded the dance held in Phillimore Place. Perhaps there is increased fulness in the features, with a *soupçon* of a double chin, but her beauty is not affected thereby, and she gives promise of becoming ultimately a type of womanhood which Rubens would have loved to transfer to his canvas. As for Algernon, he presents precisely the same appearance which he has done these ten years.

The reader must not suppose from the tone adopted by the fair Carrie that the domestic

peace of the Browns is at all disturbed, or that the great Algernon has had, during his two years of married life, any cause to repent having left the kingdom of Bohemia for the more sedate career of a married man. On the contrary, if there be a fault, it is that Mrs. Brown is a 'leetle' too fond—a trifle too exacting. His literary pursuits compel him to absent himself a great deal from the domestic hearth ; for although composition can be executed at home, where would he acquire the material for that amusing column of gossip which he transmits weekly to a provincial paper, did he not daily spend several hours at his club ? And how often has he not to dash off a leader with the whir in his ears of the machinery of the printing press in the adjoining chamber !

All this his affectionate spouse is willing to concede, but her sense of justice and the domestic proprieties revolts against that

total absorption in the morning papers, of which Algernon is at present guilty.

‘Bravo, Tom! I knew he would fulfil my prophecy,’ exclaims Brown in an excited tone, as his eye rapidly scans the critique of a new comedy, which occupies more than a column of the ‘Times.’

‘Of whom are you talking, dear?’

‘Talking? why of Tom; Tom Richardson, my old friend, whose new comedy appears to have driven the critic completely out of his wits. He seems quite at a loss for words to describe the merits of the play. I must see about a couple of stalls at once. You will like to go—will you not, little woman?’

Carrie gave her husband one of her sweetest smiles.

‘Oh, here is another old friend (at least, not exactly an old friend),’ said Brown, correcting his speech, with some confusion of manner; ‘but it is a name we all know.

“We understand that Miss Belmour, whose picture of St. Michael made so great a sensation last season, has this year a subject from ‘Paradise Lost,’ which will be exhibited on the walls of the Royal Academy.—Mr. Edwin Gordon will exhibit a picture of ‘Glaucas and Ione,’ which we need scarcely inform our readers is taken from the ‘Last Days of Pompeii.’”

‘Whenever I hear Mr. Gordon’s name mentioned,’ said Carrie, sighing, ‘I am always reminded of the Beaumonts, and that mysterious disappearance of Mr. Beaumont! I wonder if we shall ever know the truth? Do you know I always fancy that you took a great deal of trouble about that affair.’

‘I merely endeavoured to elucidate the mystery, for the sake of his two daughters,’ coldly replied Brown, in a manner to deprecate further conversation on the subject.

‘Poor girls!’ said Carrie. ‘I wonder what became of them. Do you remember

the evening of the *tableaux*, and how anxious you were to dance with me ?’

‘*Non mi ricordo*,’ said Brown.

‘Is that Latin ?’ inquired Mrs. Brown.
‘It isn’t French.’

‘It is very choice Italian, my love.’

‘It is some time since we met Mr. Lawson,’ pursued Carrie.

‘And I sincerely trust that a similar period will elapse ere we have that pleasure again,’ said Brown. ‘But now, my darling, you must excuse me. I have a very busy day before me. I have half-a-dozen studios to visit, to go to a meeting at St. James’s Hall, call at the club and write a couple of columns of anticipations of the Academy for to-morrow’s daily.’

Carrie watched from the window the retreating figure of her husband, and was about to leave the dining-room, when she perceived a letter lying on the floor. On examining it, she found it was addressed to Algernon, at the club. The writing was evidently

that of a lady, and the envelope being open, Carrie mechanically drew out the letter and read as follows :—

‘ *St. John’s Wood.*

‘ DEAR MR. BROWN,—Can you conveniently call on Tuesday next, instead of Monday, about eleven o’clock, at which hour I am more likely to be *alone*? I am anxious to speak to you about *old times*.—Ever yours sincerely,

GRACE BELMOUR.’

‘ Tuesday! that is to-day? This is one of the studios Algernon has to visit, but *alone—old times!* O Algernon! I thought I knew *all* your past life, like other wives.’ Mrs. Brown here wiped some tears which welled involuntarily from her bright blue eyes.

Suddenly, as if possessed by a new idea, Carrie hastily rang the bell, and ordered the servant to fetch a cab immediately.

‘ A close cab, ma’am?’

‘No, a hansom,’ said Mrs. Brown; ‘that will go in half the time.’ This last sentence was spoken, be it remarked, *sotto voce*.

The servant having departed on the errand, Mrs. Algernon Brown thus soliloquised. The habit of soliloquy is not so rare as is generally supposed, and is not necessarily confined to ‘Hamlet’ and the heroes of the poetical drama. It is usually practised by persons who are unavoidably compelled to pass a great portion of their lives alone. And poor Carrie, from the reasons we have already stated, spent a considerable portion of her life *solus* in her drawing-room. To be sure, there were the usual callers, which involved calls in her turn, but many a time did Carrie dine alone in the large gloomy dining-room—the only sound perceptible being the ticking of the Louis Quatorze clock on the chimney-piece. So, as we have already observed, Carrie soliloquised,—

‘Yes, *I* will go to St. John’s Wood! It is now half-past nine o’clock. I can easily get there by ten. I will see this Grace Belmour, who has the impertinence to write to my husband about “old times,” and when Algernon arrives he shall find one whom he little expects. Let me see,—what excuse can I make to this woman for calling on her? I will ask her to paint my portrait. Oh, here is the cab. Tell the cabman to wait, Simmons.’

In a shorter space of time than she had ever achieved the feat, Mrs. Brown appeared costumed for the journey, and the next moment was speeding at a rapid pace in the direction of St. John’s Wood. Mrs. Brown almost wished the cabman would not drive so fast, for she had not half decided what course to adopt when her husband appeared on the scene. But hansom cabmen are generally the owners of good cattle, and there is an undoubted

instance of a horse, which only lost the Derby by a short head, figuring in the shafts of a cab in Camden Town. The cab has now halted at the address given, and the driver has departed, after an expression of deep gratitude for the liberal recompence which Mrs. Brown has bestowed on him, for this was not an occasion when shillings could be considered.

‘What name, Madam?’ inquired the servant.

‘Oh, let me see. I am a complete stranger to Miss Belmour; but you can say Mrs. Jackson.’

After a brief period of waiting in the dining-room, a light footstep is heard on the stairs, and a small *petite* figure enters the room. One glance is sufficient, and only one word is uttered, and that word by Mrs. Brown—‘*Grace!*’ and she is sobbing on the neck of her old friend and school-fellow, Grace Beaumont.



CHAPTER II.

THE TWO STUDIOS.

IF the surprise of Mrs. Brown was great, that of Grace Beaumont was greater, at the incident which we have described in the last chapter. The name of Jackson only conveyed the idea of a total stranger to Grace, and to find in that stranger her old friend Carrie Dawson, whose name she knew at this moment was Brown, was certainly confusion worse confounded! But Grace had too much good sense to appeal for any explanation of the mystery at this present time, for Carrie was still sobbing and crying as if her heart would break. So Miss Belmour (as we will still

call her for the present) proposed that they should adjourn to the studio.

‘For,’ as Grace remarked, ‘there we shall be more to ourselves than in this apartment, where we are liable to callers at any moment. In that sacred retreat only the specially privileged are admitted ; so let us leave this at once, before it is too late.’

Mrs. Brown had by this time become more composed, and suffered Grace to lead her to the studio, which was on the first floor. A room with a large window looking towards the north ; two or three lay figures in different attitudes, costumed and draped, which for a moment gave Mrs. Brown the idea that there were occupants in the room ; and a large canvas on which Grace was painting the finishing touches of her picture, the subject being ‘Belial in Pandemonium,’ and which was intended for the forthcoming exhibition at the Royal Academy. So much Mrs. Brown took in at a glance, and then she

turned her large blue eyes on her friend the artist. Three years had worked a far greater change in Grace than they had done in the case of her friend Carrie Dawson. The features were more attenuated, the dark brown eyes appeared larger by comparison, the lines round the mouth were more defined, giving an increased expression of firmness and resolution. The struggles for existence had not been undergone without leaving their traces on the delicate features and fragile form of Grace Beaumont. The dark hair was now parted on one side, and hung in clustering curls round the keen, intellectual face. She wore a blue serge dress, and a large white apron, from the neck to the feet.

During this brief inspection on the part of Mrs. Brown, she was considering and revolving, in what she called her mind, what reason to allege for her very early call at the studio. To state the real cause,

that her visit had been prompted by jealousy, was, of course, out of the question. Every moment she expected to hear the ring of the bell announcing the arrival of her husband. What excuse could she make to Algernon? Finally, she resolved to meet the difficulties as they arose, and trust to the inspiration of the moment. So when Grace inquired, with a tone of mock gravity, to what cause she was indebted for the honour of Mrs. Brown's morning call, the little woman replied,—

‘ Well, dear, I had of course heard of the celebrated artist, Miss Belmour, and I thought I should like you to paint my portrait, and then I would astonish Algernon with the gift on his birth-day.’

Mrs. Brown devoutly hoped that the recording angel would not inscribe this falsehood in the book ; but, as she mentally observed, anything was better than allowing a third person to suppose her married

life was in the smallest degree tinged with the demon of jealousy.

‘I do not paint portraits,’ replied Grace; ‘only historical subjects, or poetical ones, as you perceive.’

As Grace spoke, Mrs. Brown was gazing intently at the figure of Belial on the canvas. The features recalled some well-known face; but it was in vain she endeavoured to fix the resemblance with a name, so she turned to Grace.

‘Well, dear, I have so much to say, so much to tell you, and so many questions to ask; but I expect Algernon every minute.’

‘You were aware, then, that Mr. Brown was coming here this morning?’ interrupted Grace in a surprised tone.

Poor Mrs. Brown was now more confused than ever. The note which Grace had written to Algernon was evidently intended for his eye alone. How then could Mrs.

Brown have become acquainted with the contents, unless her husband had betrayed the confidence reposed in him by Miss Belmour. For the present it was all a mystery to Grace.

‘Don’t ask me, please ; there’s a dear. I will tell you all another time.’

The sound of a cab stopping at the house caused Grace to approach the window.

‘Here *is* Mr. Brown, Carrie ?’

‘Oh, let me hide, Grace ; only for a moment ; just to surprise him.’

The wonder of Grace was now increased tenfold.

‘What ! does Mr. Brown not know of your being here ?’

‘Why, of course, he doesn’t, my darling Grace. How should he ?’

Mrs. Brown hastily concealed herself behind one of the draped lay figures, with the conviction that to attempt at any future time to explain the embroglio would be a

simple impossibility. Hardly had she done so, when her husband entered the studio.

‘Good morning, my dear Miss Belmour. I am rather behind the time you appointed ; but it was unavoidable.’

It was not without some confusion that Grace accepted the outstretched hand of greeting tendered by Brown. The situation was so absurd, almost like what one sees in a French comedy. How long did foolish Mrs. Brown intend to remain concealed. The Gordian knot was, however, cut in a very unexpected manner by Brown himself.

‘As I came along in the cab just now, I was considering that, if you had no objection, it would be as well that I should tell Carrie that the rising artist Miss Belmour was none other than her old friend and school-fellow, Grace Beaumont. I can quite understand the reasons which have prevailed with you in the past for keeping your identity

a secret ; but, as you become more known, it will not be possible to preserve the secret much longer. And then Carrie is so truthful herself, that I scarcely like to continue the deception.'

'You darling!' suddenly exclaimed his wife, as she emerged from her concealment, and rushed into his arms, and kissed him on both cheeks.

Among the numerous friends of Algernon Brown, it was a common saying that surprise was an emotion unknown to him. A man of the most unblemished character is suddenly discovered to be a swindler or a thief—an affectionate married couple, regarded by all their friends as human turtle-doves, appear in the Divorce Court, and dreadful details are published of the quarrels of their married life—Miss Virgo, at the end of her first season, elopes with Major Silenus, a married man, and the father of a dozen children—all these items of news are

received by Algernon Brown with the most perfect equanimity. For, as he observes, 'It is the unexpected which always happens.' But on the present occasion he certainly betrayed a certain amount of astonishment.

'Why, Carrie! what on earth brought you here?'

'Oh, please, don't ask me now; it is a secret—a mystery,—isn't it, Grace?' Then whispering in her husband's ear, 'I will tell you, darling, everything when we reach home!'

Algernon was perforce compelled to acquiesce in this arrangement, while Grace felt immensely relieved at this termination of the affair. Mrs. Brown led her husband towards the picture.

'And now, Algernon, I wish you to tell me whom this picture resembles.'

Brown changed colour as he involuntarily replied,—

'Lawson, as I live!'

The colour also came and went on the cheek

of Grace as her ear caught the exclamation. But in reply to the inquiring glance of Brown, she simply inclined her head.

‘ I presume you will quote in the catalogue the well-known passage,—

“ He seem’d
For dignity composed and high exploit :
But all was false and hollow ; though his tongue
Dropp’d manna, and could make the worse appear
The better reason.” ’

The quick eye of Mr. Brown perceived that Grace was much agitated as Algernon spoke the lines in a musing attitude, while he contemplated the picture.

‘ Now, Grace, dear, don’t let me prevent you having that talk of old times with Algernon which you were looking forward to with so much pleasure.’

‘ Ha ! ha ! ’ said Brown, smiling, ‘ a light dawns upon me. The mystery is dispelled.’ Then, turning to Grace, ‘ I presume the chat had some reference to Mrs. Ramsay—had it not ? ’

‘That is my sister,’ said Grace, smiling, in answer to Mrs. Brown’s look of wonder.

‘Ethel! oh, tell me all about her—married! To a rich man, of course (catch Ethel marrying a poor man)?’—*Sotto voce*. ‘Pray forgive me, Gracie, but you know Ethel had always a keen appreciation of the good things of this life. To whom is she married?’

‘To a Mr. Ramsay of the Grange, — shire,’ said Grace.

‘The Grange!’ replied Carrie, ‘that sounds well. Is there a moat, and all that sort of thing? I suppose Mr. Ramsay is not a young man? No, of course not. One cannot have everything? There are exceptions, sometimes, to be sure,’ continued Carrie, with a gratified smile at Algernon. ‘Is she happy?’

It was with a very grave tone that Grace responded,—

‘My sister Ethel has her troubles, like everyone else, I suppose. I am going to

the Grange to-morrow, on a visit for a few days, and will defer any confidences till my return.'

Mrs. Brown thought it advisable to change the conversation.

'Does Mr. Gordon know who is Miss Belmour?'

'He does; the similarity of our pursuits made the fact known to him; but he has kept my secret till the present time at my earnest request.'

The pale face of Grace had crimsoned to the temples during this speech.

'Have you seen his picture, Miss Belmour?' said Brown.

'Not very recently.'

'I have arranged to call there this morning. You will come, Carrie, of course. Will you not accompany us, Miss Belmour?' said Brown.

'Oh do; there's a dear!' implored his spouse.

So it was settled that they should at once proceed to Mr. Gordon's studio, and sit in judgment on 'Glaucus and Ione.'

During the momentary absence of Grace, to prepare for her walk, Algernon took his wife's hand within his own, and assuming a mock gravity,—

'Confess, daughter; you found a letter from Grace, this morning?'

'I did.'

'And read it?'

'I did.'

'And you came here at once post haste on a voyage of discovery?'

'Yes.'

'I fear me, prompted by a jealous motive?'

The eyes of Carrie began to fill with tears. Fortunately the entrance of Grace brought the ordeal of the confessional to a close.

The studio of Edwin Gordon was within

a few minutes' walk of the residence of Miss Belmour. Without any ceremony they were at once admitted, and found the painter, palette on thumb, engaged in putting the final touches on his Academy picture.

'An attack in force, Edwin?' said Brown, as the artist shook hands with his visitors, and placed chairs for the ladies.

'A regular storming party, are we not? But whom have we here? Another portrait—Ethel! by all that's wonderful!'

It was, indeed, so. There, under the counterfeit presentment of the Greek slave, was Ethel, in all the pride of her glorious beauty, as she appeared in the *tableaux* three years ago. Grace sat lost in thought, regarding the picture with a combination of ideas, the predominant one being—He still loves her!

Gordon broke the silence.

'Mrs. Brown may not be aware that an artist seldom trusts to his imagination, never,

when by any possibility he can procure a model ; and where could I obtain a more suitable one than my remembrance affords me of the lovely Ethel Beaumont ? Miss Belmour here is fully aware of this.'

'We have had "ocular proof," as Othello says, of *that* fact,' said Brown ; 'we have just come from Miss Belmour's studio.'

'Is Ethel changed at all since her marriage ?' said Carrie.

'This is no longer the portrait of my sister,' replied Grace, mournfully ; 'but I must return. I expect callers soon after twelve.

'And I,' said Brown, 'have four other studios to knock off (excuse the phrase) ; and as for you, Carrie, you had better return "to the place from whence you came," as the judges say—I suppose you came in a hansom—eh ?'

'One word,' said his wife, taking Algernon aside, 'you forgive me ? And you won't mention the subject again ?'

‘Never, pet.’

‘If Miss Belmour has no objection,’ said Gordon, ‘I will accompany her on her return.’

In a few minutes Mrs. Brown was careering homewards in her hansom, while her husband was speeding in a contrary direction towards Fitzroy Square in another hansom.

Grace was meanwhile escorted by Edwin Gordon to her studio—a positive promise having been extracted from her by Mrs. Brown that she would come to Leinster Square and have a delicious chat about everything and everybody, immediately after her return from the Grange.





CHAPTER III.

THE GRANGE.

THE Grange was a large rambling building, sadly out of repair, except the few rooms which were in actual occupation. Originally erected soon after the reign of Elizabeth, it had fallen into disuse; had been repaired and added to from time to time until the composition, in an architectural point of view, was of the most hybrid character.

For many years prior to its occupation by Mr. Ramsay, the Grange had remained untenanted. Mr. Ramsay had then appeared on the scene, and succeeded in becoming its purchaser for a very moderate sum. He furnished half-a-dozen rooms in the modern

style, engaged three female servants, and thus became 'Mr. Ramsay of the Grange.' He had always been an ambitious man, even when his means were quite inadequate for the fulfilment of his plans, and with all his worldly knowledge and experience, often preferred sound and appearances to personal comfort and realities.

The Grange was a show-house, and people came from far and near to wander through the antique apartments, and listen to the anecdotes retailed by the guide (one of the servants before alluded to), a garrulous old dame, who showed the room in which King James had slept, and the destruction caused to the building by the Ironsides of Cromwell, who had made it for a term their headquarters, and undergone a brief siege by Lord Wilmot.

Many of the rooms still contained a portion of the original furniture, some of the portraits, and a few steel helmets and breast-

plates. A specific charge was made for admission, and the names of the visitors were inscribed in a book; so that Mr. Ramsay knew to a shilling the amount of the receipts, and this sum went a considerable way towards the very moderate expenditure of Mr. Ramsay's household. Not but what Mr. Ramsay knew how to entertain right royally on those few occasions when guests crossed his threshold and partook of his hospitality. The claret he gave his visitors was the finest Château La Rose; the hock the Duke of Nassau's Cabinet Steinberg; the port had been bottled in the famous comet year.

As he gave the keys to his housekeeper to procure these rare vintages from the cellar, he would check the number of sixpenny guides which had been sold during the day to the visitors.

The surroundings of the Grange were as desolate as could be imagined. A gardener was occasionally employed to trim and cut

away the weeds which grew near the living portion of the Grange, but they were suffered to grow in wild luxuriance, mingled with the flowers in the other portions of the grounds. The fruit-trees, untended, had in many cases ceased to bear, and where they had, 'the pear and quince lay squandered on the grass,' and all around was desolation.

As the country was perfectly flat for miles, the view from the windows, if extensive, was neither cheerful nor picturesque.

Such was the home of Mrs. John Ramsay, *née* Ethel Beaumont.

Before we renew our acquaintance with the fair Ethel, it may be as well if we give some brief account of her courtship and marriage with Mr. Ramsay two years previous to this period. This courtship, as the reader already knows, was of short duration, as Ethel became his wife a few months after her arrival at Homewood to act as the companion of Miss Bagster. Although he had

sought every opportunity of engaging Ethel in conversation during his frequent visits to the house, had admired her playing on the pianoforte, and listened with great interest to her views of life and society, his proposal to make her his wife had fallen upon her mental nature with all the force of a thunderbolt. To stammer out a refusal, with thanks for the honour he intended her, was her first and natural impulse. No consideration was necessary for an instant in the opinion of Ethel. He received the refusal with the most unruffled composure, at the same time begging her not to mention the fact of his proposal to Miss Bagster. To this very natural request Ethel of course consented.

Mr. Ramsay resumed his former demeanour as if nothing so important as an offer of marriage had ever passed between them. Nevertheless Ethel found it impossible to rid her thoughts of the circumstance that one little word would have made her Mrs.

Ramsay, mistress of the Grange, independent for life, and thus enabled to bid a long farewell to any possibility of poverty, either in the present or the future. Although she did not, as we have already observed, share the suspicions of Lawson which Grace entertained, Ethel could not forbear being of opinion that he knew more about her father's death than he had ever ventured to disclose, and this opinion always stepped in whenever she felt inclined to yield to the strange influence which Lawson exercised over her mental nature, and become his wife. And now, according to his own confession, he was a struggling man! Ethel had always entertained a horror of existence fettered by narrow means, and her actual experience of poverty during her residence in Cardington Street, had not served to diminish her original impression of the unpleasantness and evils which wait upon a scanty purse.

As Christmas was approaching, Ethel was

informed by Miss Bagster that she very much feared that she would be compelled to dispense with her services early in the ensuing year, owing to a great loss of revenue from her indigo plantation. The prospect then rose before her mental vision of a return to the old life in Camden Town ; for although Grace was earning an increased income by her drawings, her expenses would be nearly doubled by the return of Ethel. True, she might perchance obtain another situation as companion, but her experience of that life was not of a very entrancing description, although she had nothing tangible to complain about during her stay at Homewood. At this critical juncture, Mr. Ramsay renewed his application.

It was a dull, gloomy day in December, and her mind partook of the depression which enveloped the natural objects around her. Ethel gave him her hand, and consented to become Mrs. Ramsay, observing

at the same time, that he must not look for a loving heart, but promised him all duty and obedience, if that would content him. Mr. Ramsay raised the hand to his lips, impressed a kiss upon the taper fingers, and expressed himself perfectly satisfied. At the same time, he besought that the proposed marriage might be kept a profound secret, even from her sister, for a short period.

In January, Ethel went to London for two days at his request, and, of course, visited her sister in Camden Town. Mr. Ramsay prevailed upon Ethel to be married privately by special licence, and to return to Home-wood as companion to Miss Bagster for a short time longer.

As the reader knows, circumstances compelled Ethel to divulge the secret of the marriage without first communicating with her husband. It was some months afterwards ere she learned the real motives of Mr. Ramsay for keeping their union a

secret. The share of Lawson in causing the discovery had not yet been made known to Ethel, who left Homewood the same day for the Grange. Neither Ethel nor Mr. Ramsay had seen Miss Bagster from that day.

Immediately after the disclosure of her marriage to Mr. Ramsay, Ethel wrote to Grace the following letter :—

‘ MY DARLING GRACE,—I scarcely know how to commence this epistle! You will think me so *secretive*, and so *unsisterlike*! but I cannot help it. I am *married* to Mr. Ramsay of the Grange! The marriage was solemnised a few weeks ago, the day following that I spent with you in Cardington Street. It was by *special* licence, and, at the desire of my husband, was kept a *profound* secret! I was *compelled* two days ago to inform Miss Bagster. I will tell you all about it when I see you. You have,

of course, often heard me speak of Mr. Ramsay. You will *now* wish to know—Do I love him? I *do not*, and before accepting him, gave him to understand *most distinctly* that I was only prepared with *duty* and *obedience*, and that sort of thing. I think that was very *honourable* of me, was it not? You know, my dear sister, that I never was, and never could be, guilty of *selfishness*. In all *probability* I should have had to leave Homewood, as Miss Bagster has experienced very *heavy losses*, and then I should have had to return, and become a *burden* on my dear Grace! I can assure you, my darling, that *you*, and *you* alone, were the *prominent* object of my thoughts when I accepted Mr. Ramsay. How could I *benefit* my dear sister?—that was my *first* and *last* thought! Now you will only have yourself to consider, and I am sure you will always achieve an independence, perhaps wealth! Poor Ethel was always an

incumbrance, an *incapable*! but she is that *now* no longer. I only came to the Grange yesterday. It is a rather gloomy-looking place, and from what I understand from Mr. Ramsay, he sees *very little* company, and scarcely any *ladies*, but if I find my life dull, I shall be *supported* by the *consciousness* that I have acted for the *best*, especially for the *good* of my *dearest sister*. Adieu. Write *soon*; and believe me, ever your loving sister,

‘ETHEL RAMSAY.

‘P.S.—Of course you can come down *whenever* you please, and stay a *day or two*.’

It was the close of an afternoon in April, and Ethel sat in a luxurious fauteuil awaiting the arrival of her sister. The window at which she sat commanded a view of the roadway for a considerable distance, and it was along this route that the fly which would bring Grace from the station would appear.

The day had been a genuine April one of sunshine and showers, but the sun was now shining brightly on the wet foliage, and every leaf was hung as it were with diamonds. Behind the wood on the left, the sun was sinking to rest in a watery sky of pale primrose, plainly perceptible through the as yet half-clad elms and beech trees.

Although only two years had passed since we saw Ethel at Homewood, a far greater change in her appearance was apparent than there was even in the person of her sister. The figure had lost a great portion of its symmetry—had become bulkier, as it were ; the features had a morose expression ; the beautiful contour of the face was gone, and a keen observer might detect thin lines in the region of the eyes, ominously like crows-feet.

An open volume of a novel lay unregarded on her lap, and her whole appearance was an embodiment of languor, satiety, and *ennui*.

She was attired in ruby velvet, and wore scarcely any jewellery, save a small necklet and locket containing a portrait of her sister.

Suddenly her cheek flushed, and she rose and advanced to the windows. A small cloud of dust appeared in the distance, and presently a fly could be discerned approaching the Grange. Yes, this must be Grace! Ethel descended to the hall, and found the servant unlocking the rusty iron gates, and in a few minutes Grace had descended from the fly, and was clasped in the embrace of Ethel!





CHAPTER IV.

THE SISTERS.

IT was a long conference the sisters held—Ethel doing the major part of the talking—Grace executing a running commentary on the history of Ethel's life at the Grange, which in a condensed form, and free from the superfluities of words with which it was overlaid by Ethel, was briefly as follows :—

Mr. Ramsay spent a considerable portion of his life from home, and on his return never vouchsafed any history or explanation of the cause of his absence. Although very penurious in his household arrangements, he was lavish with regard to any expenses incurred by Ethel. But, as she truly observed, of

what use were the most costly dresses with no female society to envy them, and no men to admire them !

Occasionally Mr. Ramsay would bring down a couple of City men on a Saturday, if he chanced to return to the Grange on that day, and they would remain till the Monday. But as the talk was chiefly on topics connected with the money market, their visits did not result in much pleasure to Ethel.

Two or three times a-year a formal dinner party would be given to some old family residents who lived about ten miles from the Grange, and these would involve a return feast on their part ; but Ethel found these festivities so oppressive that she welcomed back her old solitary life at the Grange as a relief.

A constant supply of novels from Mudie was her chief resource. The want of exercise was affecting her health, as walking alone over the dismal flats was out of the

question, and Mr. Ramsay kept no conveyance.

On her husband's return that evening, Ethel was determined to make some arrangement by which she could periodically go to London, and stay with her sister for a few days. A want of confidence and sympathy on the part of Mr. Ramsay was one of her chief grievances.

Grace could only utter common-place consolation for the present, smiling as she did so, alleging as an excuse her utter ignorance of the trials and duties of married life, her conviction that every wife had some evil or drawback in her lot, which militated against that perfect condition of happiness which all were striving to secure, and none could possibly expect to attain.

‘Why, Gracie, dear, you speak like a copy-book, or Mrs. Trimmer! But I shall expect you to talk in a different strain to Mr. Ramsay when he arrives.’

Grace shook her head.

‘It is an exceedingly delicate task to interfere between man and wife, even for a sister.’

‘O Grace, why don’t you say, “Virtue is its own reward,” and “Honesty is the best policy”?’

Grace laughed as she rejoined,—

‘Suppose we adjourn the debate.’

So the sisters occupied the brief time which remained, till the advent of Mr. Ramsay, in discussing the latest fashions and inspecting the magnificent costumes which the much-maligned Mr. Ramsay had bestowed on his young and beautiful wife.’

Mr. Ramsay arrived during the half-hour allotted to the toilette, and when they entered the drawing-room, he was waiting to receive them. He welcomed Grace with the air of *un grand seigneur*, and imprinted a chaste salute on the cheek of Ethel. He expressed the pleasure he felt at the visit of Ethel’s

sister, and hoped that her artistic studies would not interfere with her making a stay of some days.

During the dinner hour, he conversed on every conceivable topic, and displayed a large amount of special and general information. Altogether, he made a favourable impression on Grace, but still the fact remained that her sister lived a very solitary life at the Grange, and one that no husband, with any sympathy in his nature, should condemn his wife to lead.

Grace was determined to place this view of the subject before him, let the consequences be what they might, as she plainly perceived that 'the little rift within the lute,' if not attended to at once, would widen and become a breach, impossible to heal.

Grace detested from the bottom of her heart anything like cunning or scheming, and therefore no plan had been concerted

between the sisters as to leaving Grace and Mr. Ramsay alone for private discussion—but Ethel solved the difficulty; after playing a sonata on the piano, she pleaded a headache, and requested permission to retire early. Grace had her suspicions about this convenient headache, but nevertheless resolved to avail herself of the opportunity.

So, after some casual remarks, Grace began,—

‘Mr. Ramsay, I am anxious to say a few words upon a subject which is very dear to me—that of my sister’s happiness and peace of mind.’

Mr. Ramsay started, and directed a keen, suspicious glance at Grace.

‘Happiness! is she not happy? Why does she not complain to her husband, instead of babbling to her sister?’

‘My sister does not make any definite or actual complaint, Mr. Ramsay. Pray,

bear in mind that my sister has neither father nor mother. I am her only relative ; also, Ethel is very young. What more natural than that she should confide her faintest shadow of discontent to an elder sister.'

'Discontent !' exclaimed Mr. Ramsay. 'Is not this house fit for a princess ? Is she not attired like one ? If she has a single wish ungratified, is that not the fault of her own ill-judged reticence ?'

'True, Mr. Ramsay ; but this only has reference to the body's requirements, there is the life of the soul—society, and sympathy.'

'Society ! Miss Belmour. In every case where I have introduced her to the society of the county, she has complained of them as formal prigs, and declared that it takes at least three days to recover the depression caused thereby ; and how gladly she returns to her books, her flowers, and her music. If I bring men from the City on a Saturday

for the Sunday, she treats them with scant courtesy.'

'Yes, Mr. Ramsay, but my sister requires female society—young and lively.'

'Ah! that involves male society of the same description, Miss Belmour. Now I never forget that I am nearly forty years the senior of Ethel, and "Lead us not into temptation" is a daily supplication on the part of every one of us. Do you know, Miss Belmour, what formed the chief attraction of Ethel in my eyes when I asked her to marry me? Her being an *orphan*! I obtained a wife whom I thought I could mould as I pleased. I was a husband without a mother-in-law, a unique and peerless lot! But I did not consider that a strong-minded sister almost equals that unknown quantity. However, my dear Miss Belmour, I think you have executed your delicate and difficult task with considerable diplomatic tact, and I

will hereby consent to a periodical visit on her part to your house in St. John's Wood as often as shall be subsequently determined, and for such time as shall be considered reasonable by the contracting parties. In token hereof I hereby seal the bond.'

Mr. Ramsay advanced and raised the hand of Grace to his lips. Then dismissing the subject apparently from his thoughts, he plunged into one of his amusing monologues, and described, with graphic and picturesque force, rides across the Pampas; life in the Californian gold diggings; marvellous escapes from shipwreck; his experience as a member of the Carbonari; the straits to which he had been reduced; the crowned heads he had spoken to in familiar converse. He would commence an anecdote of Louis Philippe with these words,—

‘When I dined with the old fellow at

St. Cloud,' a mode of speech which, though it perhaps somewhat savoured of familiarity, yet tended to bring a listener into more immediate contact with the person spoken about than if the relater had adopted the usual decorous phrases.

Grace enjoyed these various experiences, but reflected at the same time how completely they would be thrown away upon Ethel, if Mr. Ramsay ever attempted such reminiscences ; but the husband of Ethel had long ago, by unpleasant experience, arrived at a similar conclusion.

When Grace retired she found Ethel awake, and communicated to her the glad intelligence that Mr. Ramsay had of his own free will consented to frequent visits by Ethel to her sister in St. John's Wood.

Mr. Ramsay lighted a large regalia, when he had bade his sister-in-law good night, and half aloud thus soliloquised,—

‘All women are born actresses! How admirably that headache of Ethel’s was simulated; the heavy eyelid, the flushed face, would have convinced the whole College of Physicians! It was very *apropos.*’





CHAPTER V.

THE TEMPLE.

OUR readers will perhaps remember that our friend Mr. Lawson possessed a confidential and trustworthy clerk of the name of Simpson. One fine morning towards the end of April, as the clock of St. Dunstan's was striking ten, Mr. Simpson on arriving at the office discovered an individual leaning against the outer door, which door is supposed to be made of oak, hence the term when the door is closed, 'sporting the oak.' The individual in question was very small in stature, with legs slightly bowed, and encased in very tightly-fitting trousers. His age was either twenty or fifty. That is, he was either a

very old-looking young man, or a very young-looking old man. The light was so indifferent on the landing, that Mr. Simpson for a moment failed to recognise the caller. Presently he extended his hand and exclaimed,—

‘What! little Mark! Walk in Mr. Mark; glad to see you. What has brought you up here so early?’

Mr. Simpson unlocked both doors and placed a chair for ‘Little Mark,’ and then sat down opposite to him, and placing both hands in his pockets, contemplated his visitor with speechless admiration. Mr. Mark, or ‘Little Mark,’ as he was usually called, was the confidential jockey of Mr. Lawson, whenever that gentleman required his services in a professional capacity. Mr. Mark withstood the admiring scrutiny of the clerk with profound equanimity, and kept his eyes fixed upon the ceiling, as if absorbed in some abstruse mental calculation.

‘Gov’nor in?’ exclaimed the jockey, at length.

‘I expect him every minute,’ rejoined Simpson. ‘Am I again to repeat my observation, Mr. Mark? What little game is the Gov’nor up to now?’ A pause. ‘Is Nancy meant for the stakes? Come now; I am a poor man as you know, with a lot of kids, and the Missis not well. And what with schooling and doctor’s bills, and a depreciated sovereign—I don’t mean Her Most Gracious Majesty—heaven forbid!—but a pound. The late Sir Robert Peel once puzzled the House of Commons by asking what is a pound? I could very soon tell him. I wish he had come to me. A pound, Mr. Mark, now-a-days, is ten shillings, or 120 pence. That’s what a pound is. Come, Mr. Mark, give us a straight tip! Is Nancy meant?’

The jockey gave a suspicious glance at Simpson, as he replied,—

‘Either Nancy or Waxy. In my ’pinion

Waxy can give Nancy 7 lbs. and a beating, over a two-mile course. I want to get instructions from the Gov'nor. Lay against Nancy and back Waxy. I ride Nancy, if I get the office from Mr. Lawson. Nancy is safe. Of course I can't guarantee the other event, but I consider it a "moral." It seems a pity, don't it, to pull a good thing like Nancy. But what's the use of her just losing on the post, and me and you and the Gov'nor a pot of money besides, when we can make a certainty 'tother way. That's the way I look at it, Mr. Simpson. But mind you don't go for to speak of it to anyone, for goodness' sake. If you do, you'll spile the whole bilin' of it.'

Mr. Simpson asseverated in the most emphatic manner that his friend might depend on his preserving the most inviolable secrecy.

'And look here,' continued the jockey, 'when I come out of the Gov'nor's room, if

Nancy is to be pulled, I'll say Waxy. If Mr. Lawson goes for Nancy, why I'll tell you accordin'—you understand?'

'All right,' rejoined Simpson; 'I'm fly. Here is the Gov'nor.'

Mr. Lawson now entered the office.

'Oh, Mark, you here? I'll see you in a few minutes, as soon as I have read my letters.'

This operation did not apparently consume much time, for in less than five minutes the bell rang, and Mr. Mark was ushered into Mr. Lawson's private room.

Ten minutes elapsed, and Mark reappeared. He passed rapidly through the office, merely ejaculating, in a hoarse whisper, one word,—

'Waxy.'

During the two years which have passed since Lawson was petrified with amazement in the library of Miss Bagster at the confession of Ethel, affairs have gone indif-

ferently with him. At one time winning large stakes ; at another, losing equally large ones, he still owed Mr. Ramsay the value of the bills, but he had renewed them periodically by paying heavy interest. He had not seen Ethel since the day he heard of her marriage with Mr. Ramsay.

On the occasions when Mr. Ramsay wrote to him respecting business matters, he had settled them either by letter, or postponed them till Mr. Ramsay came to town. As the last event was of frequent occurrence, there was no inconvenience in such a course. This morning he found a letter awaiting him, which tempted him sorely. It was an urgent request from Mr. Ramsay to spend a few days at the Grange, and the letter contained the words,—‘ Mrs. Ramsay will be very glad to see you.’

See Ethel again ! Again contemplate her glorious beauty ! Hear her well-known voice ! Breathe the same atmosphere

with her ! Listen to those songs of Mendelssohn once more, sung as only she could sing them ! Yes, he would accept the invitation ; he would go to the Grange. There could be no danger either to him or to her in the association. The intercourse would possess a charm it had never known before, inasmuch as there would be that perfect freedom which should prevail between a gentleman and a married lady, even although, as in this case, tender relations had aforetime existed between them. Yes ! he would write by return and accept Mr. Ramsay's invitation.

While Mr. Lawson wrote his letter to the Grange, his clerk Simpson was also penning an epistle to a Mr. Daniel, and whose place of abode was Chelsea. The note was as follows :—

‘ DEAR SIR,—Come if you possibly can this evening to the “ Spotted Dog ” about

eight ; I have something good. Mum !—
Yours truly, T. SIMPSON.'

The 'Spotted Dog' was a small tavern or public-house, situate in one of the narrow streets leading to the Thames. It was frequented by many of the lawyers' clerks in the Temple—at least by those of sporting tendencies—and here they were accustomed to smoke their pipes, or 'blow their clay,' as they termed it in their vernacular, and stake their humble half-crowns with each other on the issue of the coming race.

During the last two years, Mr. Simpson had made the acquaintance of a certain Mr. Daniel, whom we may at once inform the reader, without any circumlocution, was none other than Mr. Daniel Woodman, sometime chief detective attached to the Mansion House, and now the celebrated private inquiry agent. He had introduced himself to the clerk of Mr. Lawson under his

Christian name alone, and the acquaintance first began at the 'Spotted Dog' had grown in course of time to a warm friendship. His object in taking so much trouble the reader will discover in due course.

Mr. Simpson's mansion was situated at Islington, so on this occasion he was compelled to venture forth after his evening meal upon false pretences advanced to Mrs. Simpson, in order to keep the appointment he had made with his friend, Mr. Daniel.

So at eight o'clock, when the lawyer's clerk entered the well-known parlour, there was Mr. Daniel, puffing a clay pipe, and with a glass of hot grog on the table in front of him. A warm shake of the hand and mutual inquiries were the preliminaries to the interview which was to follow. No time was lost on the part of Simpson.

'First-rate tip—straight from the fountain head. Nancy to be pulled—that is a certainty—Waxy to win.'

Mr. Daniel gave two or three puffs from his yard of clay, and meditated.

‘Is the last a certainty also?’

‘Well, a turf certainty—a moral! We know it is meant, and the money on. Bar accidents, sure to win!’

Another pause and much Burleigh-like consideration on the part of Mr. Daniel.

‘Authority?’

‘Little Mark,’ replied Simpson.

‘All right. I’ll put the money on.’

Mr. Simpson fidgeted, and appeared very restless for some moments.

‘You’ll excuse me, Mr. Daniel, but you said if I got you a straight tip, you’d stand a couple of quid; and I am breaking a solemn promise I made to Little Mark.’

‘All right,’ said Daniel; ‘here they are.’

Mr. Simpson clutched at the two sovereigns which his friend threw on the table.

‘Oh, and would you have any objection to lend me a fiver ; I can get tens, and I should like to back Waxy to win.’

Mr. Daniel hesitated. It would not do to yield too readily to the demands of the lawyer's clerk, so the detective said he would consider that question, and let Mr. Simpson know in the course of the next day.

That business settled, the two gentlemen applied themselves to their whisky and pipes, and discussed the affairs of the nation, and arranged everything to their satisfaction. Mr. Daniel was very liberal with respect to potations, and by degrees, as the hours rolled on, Mr. Simpson became loquacious and confidential. Mr. Daniel artfully turned the conversation to the subject of Mr. Beaumont's mysterious disappearance three years ago ; whereupon Simpson assumed an air of mystery, put his finger to his nose, and almost repeated the words of Hamlet,—‘Well, well, we know ;—We could, an’ if we

would'—when talking to Horatio respecting the appearance of the Ghost.

The glass of Simpson was again replenished, and at last the words, 'Pocket-book'—'Missing'—'I know where it is at this moment'—came at intervals from the lips of the lawyer's clerk. But all the perseverance of Daniel was powerless to evoke more details respecting the affair, till, finally, the detective perceived that in his anxiety to extract the truth, he had overdone the stimulating means, and, therefore, had no alternative but to renew the attempt at an early and more favourable opportunity.

'The chimes at midnight' were sounding from the spire of St. Mary's, Islington, as Mr. Simpson was being deposited in a comatose state at the door of his residence in Theberton Street, greatly to the indignation of the partner of his fortunes and his cares. Mr. Daniel had handsomely remunerated the cabman to perform this onerous and important duty.



CHAPTER VI.

‘SHOULD AULD ACQUAINTANCE.’

WHEN Mr. Ramsay told Lawson that Mrs. Ramsay would be glad to see him, he was not stating that which was not true. It was with a certain mental disturbance that Ethel heard her husband casually mention that he should invite Mr. Lawson to the Grange for a few days, in order that he might more conveniently arrange certain matters of business on which Mr. Lawson was acting as his professional adviser.

After the first shock caused by the familiar name, Ethel almost experienced a sensation of joy that such an event as the visit of an old friend was about to occur to dispel

the intense monotony of the life she led at the Grange ; and, accordingly, she replied with perfect truth that she would be glad to see Mr. Lawson. Then a revulsion of feeling took place, and Ethel seized the opportunity, while Mr. Ramsay wrote the letter, to withdraw into the garden, for the atmosphere of the house seemed to stifle her, and a sensation, as if the walls of the room were collapsing, caused her to pant for air,—for space,—for the free atmosphere of the heavens, and the refreshing breezes of the spring in the grounds of the Grange. A favourite spot of Ethel's was in a remote part of the grounds where

‘ Vagrant plants of parasitic breed
Had overgrown the dial.’

Here would she sit for hours during those melancholy days, when she was (excepting the household) the sole occupant of the Grange. Here would the thought involuntarily obtrude itself, had she done wisely

in consenting to become the wife of Mr. Ramsay? Had she only exercised a little more patience, she would now have been the companion of Grace, free and happy, and the sharer of her prosperity. If she had erred, the error had been the offspring of unselfishness. She was the victim to the wish to relieve her sister from the expense of her support. This was the conclusion Ethel ever struggled to arrive at, when troubled by self-torturing thoughts which were continually arising to destroy her mental peace and happiness. But now all these were scattered to the winds by one thought, and one only—Lawson was coming to the Grange! How would he meet her? Ethel had never seen him since that wintry day when they met in the wood, and she had told him their union was impossible. The day when, brought to bay, as it were, by Miss Bagster, she had confessed her secret marriage with Mr. Ramsay. Would he detect her discon-

tent with her present life—that discontent which was ever gnawing like a vulture at her very heart strings? She would exert herself to the utmost to prevent such a humiliating fact becoming patent to the lynx-like eyes of Lawson.

Accordingly, during the time which intervened between the invitation and the arrival of Lawson, Ethel busied herself with her domestic duties, practised her songs, especially those of Mendelssohn, which Lawson so much admired, rose early, took walking exercise, and, in fact, was so improved in spirits and appearance, that Mr. Ramsay could scarce forbear from complimenting her on the change.

On the day fixed for the arrival of their visitor, Mr. Ramsay went to London, and arranged that he would bring Mr. Lawson with him in the fly to a six o'clock dinner.

It was the custom of Ethel to retire to her dressing-room at half-past five, but on this

occasion it was scarcely five when she withdrew to execute the important operation of dressing.

At half-past five the fly was heard approaching the Grange, and through the venetian blind Ethel saw her husband and Lawson enter the garden by the iron gates, which closed with their customary clang. Ethel waited patiently till she heard both the gentlemen descend to the drawing-room ; and then, with a beating heart and a rapid pulse, she left her dressing-room. Shall we confess it ? Prior to so doing, she drank a wine glassful of Eau de Cologne, which possessed in her eyes all the virtues of a stimulant without its drawbacks.

As she entered the drawing-room, Lawson arose and advanced to meet her. Ethel was attired in black velvet, which rendered her exquisite shoulders and statuesque arms, so perfect in their symmetry, more dazzling by comparison. As usual, she wore a slight

gold chain and locket round her ivory throat; a white camellia was the sole ornament of her hair.

Ethel was conscious that she no longer possessed the figure of three years ago, and the black velvet had been selected as the most likely to hide that tendency to *embonpoint*, which threatened to mar her beauty.

Coupled with the excitement of again meeting her former lover, and the art and care which she had bestowed on her appearance, Ethel certainly, on this occasion, almost looked like the Ethel of old; and the blush which overspread her still beautiful features only deepened the impression which her presence created in the susceptible heart of Lawson.

‘There is no necessity for an introduction,’ said Ramsay, as Lawson pressed the hand of Ethel, and murmured some half-articulate words as he did so.

‘The last time you saw Mrs. Ramsay she was the worry-vent of old Miss Bagster, and the companion of her solitude—now she is Mrs. John Ramsay of the Grange, and can take her place among the best families in the county.’

Ethel almost experienced a sensation of disgust, which she had never before felt, at the purse-proud tone of the speech—the reflection on the kindness of Miss Bagster—and the implied untruth in the comparison of her former solitary life with her present equally solitary existence.

Lawson made some formal inquiries as to the health of her sister, which Ethel answered as briefly as possible, and changed the conversation.

Dinner being announced, and as Ethel again found herself with her arm linked in that of Lawson’s, her memory returned in spite of her to the last occasion when she occupied a similar position ; but then she

was a salaried companion to Miss Bagster—now the wife of Miss Bagster's guest.

And again, looking back to the happy Kensington days, how often had she thus entered the dining-room in Phillimore Place, leaning on the arm of Lawson! Was it chance, or was it fate, that they should thus be constantly thrown together, no matter what might be the vicissitudes of her career?

The reader must remember, as some palliation for the romantic views and conduct of Ethel, that she was only twenty-one years of age at this present moment. During dinner, Ramsay talked of the Grange; related some of the historical incidents connected with the old house; and promised to act as *cicerone* to Lawson during his short stay. Ethel spoke but little, but performed the duties of hostess with infinite grace and courtesy.

Lawson appeared to her much older in appearance; a few grey hairs even being

visible on the temples, and his face bore evident traces of anxiety and care. Ethel dismissed the thought as soon as conceived that some of those lines might perhaps have been caused by disappointment with regard to herself. She was determined to prove to him that her life at the Grange was a happy one, and that she only lived to perform her duty to her husband.

If she had been asked the reason of the extra care bestowed on her toilet that evening, she would have answered, none other than the natural desire of every woman to appear at her best in the eye of every man !

The two gentlemen did not sit long over their wine, and speedily joined Ethel in the drawing-room. Immediately after coffee, Lawson hoped, in his usual suave manner, that Mrs. Ramsay would condescend to sing one of Mendelssohn's songs. As although two years had elapsed since he last had the

great pleasure of hearing her sing them at Homewood, his memory still treasured a vivid recollection of their entrancing melody.

Ethel took up her position at the piano, and the glorious voice rang through the large drawing-room ; and while Mr. Ramsay watched his wife with evident pride and gratification, Lawson sat with closed eyes, as if he were anxious to concentrate every faculty in the one sense of hearing ! One song succeeded another, till Mr. Ramsay showed symptoms of slumber. Lawson drew a chair close to the instrument, and again urged Ethel to fresh efforts. During the interval between two of the songs, Lawson spoke in a low voice, quite inaudible to the occupant of the arm chair at the other end of the room, even had he been awake, instead of wrapped in a sound sleep, as testified by certain unmelodious sounds which occasionally broke the silence.

‘And you are happy, Ethel? Pardon me, I should say Mrs. Ramsay.’

‘How can I be otherwise?’ said Ethel. ‘Mr. Ramsay gratifies my every wish, indulges me with every luxury. His constant study is one subject—*my* happiness!’

Lawson glanced at the recumbent figure of the model husband, from whose nasal feature proceeded a loud snort at that moment, and in spite of himself could scarce forbear a smile as he inquired,—

‘Mr. Ramsay does not appear to be a very enthusiastic auditor or admirer of the divine Mendelssohn!’

Again was Ethel forced to blush for her husband, as she replied,—

‘Mr. Ramsay is no longer a young man, and I have no doubt has had a very busy day in town.’

‘Ethel has become a model of the domestic proprieties,’ mentally exclaimed Lawson, ‘will not hear a word against the man whose

name she bears. Quite right ; I respect her for it.' This moral sentiment diffused an unusual glow of satisfaction through the brain of Mr. Lawson, probably owing to its novelty.

' I think I heard that it was Miss Bagster made the discovery that you were secretly married to Mr. Ramsay ? ' said Lawson.

' Yes,' replied Ethel, in a tone of surprise. ' But may I inquire who told you ? '

' Who told me ? I do not exactly remember ; probably Mr. Ramsay.'

Lawson felt conscious he had made a slip in utilising knowledge peculiar to himself, but trusted Ethel would not inquire too curiously respecting it.

' Did you ever learn in what manner Miss Bagster discovered the fact of your assumed name ? '

' Never ! ' replied Ethel.

' Strange ; very strange,' said Lawson, musingly.

'Miss Bagster has, I believe, left England?'

'Yes, she is now in Agra, looking after her indigo plantations.'

Mr. Ramsay here woke up.

'God bless me! I declare I have been asleep.' Come, Lawson, let us have a game at whist. I'll take dummy. We will not touch business to-night; but we must prepare ourselves for a field-day to-morrow.'

And so ended Lawson's first evening at the Grange.





CHAPTER VII.

THE NORTH TOWER.

THE two following days passed without any incident worthy of record in these veracious pages. Mr. Ramsay spent several hours closeted with Lawson, both before and after the two o'clock luncheon, so that Ethel was practically left as of yore to her own devices and powers of self-amusement during the daylight hours till the seven o'clock dinner. The usual music succeeded, Mr. Ramsay indulging in his customary nap, and the evening terminated with a rubber at whist, conducted upon the exciting principle propounded by Mr. Ramsay on the first evening of Mr. Lawson's visit.

On the morning of the third day, Mr. Ramsay complained of cold, and expressed his intention of not coming down till after luncheon; but suggested that his guest should avail himself of the services of Mrs. Ramsay, and explore the old chambers and ruins of the Grange.

As Ethel delivered this message of Mr. Ramsay's, the heart of Lawson beat high at the prospect of a long morning's ramble and uninterrupted converse with Ethel—so great a contrast to the two preceding days—occupied in poring over musty deeds and equally musty legal details with old Mr. Ramsay. Lawson expressed the utmost gratitude at the thoughtfulness of his host, and the kind concurrence of his hostess in the arrangement.

It was a delicious spring morning, and the wilderness of a garden which encompassed the Grange had lost something of its weird gloom under the influence of an April sun. Ethel, charmingly attired in a light blue robe,

and wearing a Gainsborough hat, beneath which her face beamed with nearly all its old fascination, laughingly apologised for the uncultivated condition of the grounds, and led the way to the North Tower.

‘I fancy the garden of Eden must have somewhat resembled this, Mr. Lawson, for of course there were no trim parterres and well-rolled gravel walks in the home of our first parents.’

Lawson was on the point of observing that her presence rendered the parallel more complete, uniting, as she did, in her own charming person the perfections of one of the first occupants of Paradise; but on reflection, he came to the conclusion that such a speech was hardly a suitable one to address to a married lady—at all events, he would reserve the remark for another occasion.

They duly ascended the North Tower, and the country being very flat, the view was

an extensive one. Far as the eye could reach, there was 'a sea of verdure,' the locality of the several villages being marked by thin wreaths of blue smoke, and a thick dun-like canopy resting as a pall over the distant town of —.

Lawson assumed a musing attitude as he spoke, apparently unconsciously,—

‘Oh that the desert were my dwelling-place,
With one fair Spirit for my minister,
That I might all forget the human race,
And, hating no one, love but only her.’ .

‘Pardon me, Mrs. Ramsay, but for a moment I forgot that on that snow-white hand there is a ring, and under yonder roof lies one whose name you bear. Forgive me. We are old friends, Ethel, and sometimes I cease to remember the mighty changes which have taken place since those happy Kensington days, when *you* were free and *I* had a right to love you, and to tell you so, and witness the response in your cheek, and receive

encouragement from the pressure of your hand !’

‘I cannot listen to such language, Mr. Lawson ! I shall return to the house if such conduct is persisted in !’

‘Again I entreat you to forgive me,’ continued Lawson. ‘Such words would never have left these lips did I not think, did I not feel convinced that you are not happy. Nay, Ethel, it is in vain to deny that I am speaking the truth. Do I not know every line in your dear face—alas, too well !—not to be conscious of the change created by two short years of life in this solitary wilderness. Can I forget that I once looked upon you as my future wife ? Is it possible for me to cease to take an interest in your welfare and happiness. Let me be your *friend*, your *brother* ! I am aware I am perilling the chance of all future converse with you by uttering the words which I now utter, but I cannot help it. I have watched you

these two evenings past as a mother watches the countenance of her first-born, and I can detect care, and misery, and unhappiness in those beautiful features. I can discern that in the performance of so-called *duty*, you are undergoing a penance in comparison with which the sufferings of the girl who has, without thought, taken the black veil, and buried herself in a convent, are as nought ! In her case, the deed is irrevocable ; in yours it is *revocable*. In the one case, the devotee is consoled by the thought that she is earning eternal salvation by her sacrifice of the world and its pleasures ; but in your case, you are without this consolation. You have given up *this* world, and in this solitary existence, devoid of duties, cannot feel that you are earning a title to the happiness of another.'

Ethel had sunk on some rock-work, and sat with her face buried in her hands. Lawson stood watching eagerly for the

effect of his sophistical reasoning. Slowly she removed her hands from her face, from which all colour had fled, and in piteous accents said,—

‘What would you have me to do? Would you have me break the vow I have sworn, to love and cherish my husband. I married him, after due reflection, with my eyes open, after I had once refused him. He denies me nothing.’

‘Do you *love* him?’ said Lawson. ‘Without love, marriage is only a form.’

‘*You* have no right to ask me that question,’ said Ethel. ‘I would not have listened to you one moment, had we not been old friends; did I not know that you *once* loved me.’

‘Once!’ interrupted Lawson, ‘While life shall last!’

‘Did I not know,’ continued Ethel, ‘that your love was unselfish, and was not affected by change of circumstances. All this I re-

member as some excuse for your want of honour towards your friend,—for your want of *respect* towards his wife! I compared these gardens an hour ago to Eden, with their wild beauty; alas, I did not expect so soon to find that this Eden was not without its tempter!—its serpent!’

‘As you are its Eve, dear Ethel,’ said Lawson, throwing himself on his knees before her, and covering her hands with kisses. ‘Ethel, listen to my last words. When I came here as the guest of Mr. Ramsay, I certainly looked forward with rapture to seeing you once more, but I had no intention of alluding to our past relations, to the love which I *must* entertain for you while I live. This is true, so help me Heaven!’

Lawson rose to his feet, and, in a cold respectful tone, said,—

‘Mrs. Ramsay, I will never be other than your friend in the future, the legal

adviser of the man whose name you bear.'

'Let us return to the house,' said Ethel, 'I cannot proceed further this morning. I must tell Mr. Ramsay that I am indisposed; that sudden illness has compelled me to abandon the task of being your guide on this occasion.'

They descended to the garden, where they found Mr. Ramsay slowly patrolling the grass plot near the dial.

'Good morning, sir,' said Lawson, 'I trust you are better. Mrs. Ramsay, I regret to say, was seized with a sudden faintness as soon as we arrived at the summit of the tower, so I have begged her to postpone her task till a more favourable opportunity.'

Mr. Ramsay glanced keenly and suspiciously at his wife; but, beyond a few formal words of sympathy, made no response.

'I also regret,' continued Lawson, 'that I

shall be compelled to return to town this afternoon, immediately after luncheon. I received a letter this morning, which leaves me no alternative.'

'As you please, Mr. Lawson. We have broken the neck of our work, and it can easily be completed when you come again, say in a day or two.'

Ethel availed herself of their business discussion to retire to her room, and Lawson then made his arrangements for his immediate departure.

Ethel sent a message by her maid that she had not sufficiently recovered her sudden indisposition to appear at luncheon. So the two gentlemen sat down together.

After some miscellaneous discourse,—

'By-the-bye,' said Ramsay, 'I may shortly have a delicate case for the exercise of your judgment and discretion. An old friend of mine, with a young wife (but why need I relate the details of a twice-told story),—

former lover turns up,—husband jealous,—whether cause or no is the question which remains to be discovered ; husband resolved to watch his wife by means of a paid agent. If proofs are procured, a case for Mr. Justice Hannen, etc., etc. That is the way my friend intends to go to work.’

‘ Ah, my dear sir,’ said Lawson, helping himself to a bumper of claret as he spoke, ‘ I fear we live in a very lax age. But, as I am constantly arguing, when the principles of religion are sapped, when Infidelity and Rationalism rear their heads unrebuked, when, as Disraeli observes, “ young girls prattle atheism in gilded salons.” Can we wonder that social ties are disregarded, and that the institution of marriage is looked upon as an empty form ? Why, my dear sir, if Voltaire or Tom Paine could rise from their graves, and take up some of the high-class and fashionable reviews and magazines of our day, they would be per-

fectly aghast at some of the speculations contained therein, cheek-by-jowl, as I may say, with an article by an orthodox bishop, or some eminent Nonconformist divine !'

'Quite right, Mr. Lawson,' said Ramsay ; 'I have told you how my *friend* intends to go to work. Shall I tell you *my* course of proceeding ? Supposing such an impossibility as my wife (who is as innocent as a new-born infant) ever succumbing to temptation ?' Lawson made no reply, so Mr. Ramsay unlocked a small drawer in a writing-table, and produced a six-chambered revolver. 'This is one of Colt's, and it formed my constant companion during my life in California ; was never absent from my pillow. I could not have slept a wink without it. It is old-fashioned now, is not fitted up with the latest improvements ; we are both old, yet I would undertake to send a bullet through any specified button in your waist-coat at forty paces, Mr. Lawson. It is

loaded at this moment, in fact it is almost a necessary article of furniture in a lonely house like the Grange. It would not be the first time it has sent an erring soul to its account. If the case I have described to you were mine, do you know what I would do to the man who invaded my peace?' Ramsay fixed his cold grey eye on the pallid face of the lawyer as he whispered forth,—‘ I would shoot him—*like a dog!*’

Ramsay turned round as he spoke, and threw the revolver carelessly into the drawer, locked it and put the key in his pocket.

‘ But come, Lawson, finish the bottle of claret; recorked claret is an extravagance, and let us have a farewell cigar on the lawn. Those cabanas are to be relied on.’

But the chat was by no means a prolonged one. Mr. Lawson seemed pre-occupied, and after a brief space took farewell of his host, who watched the retreating figure of his guest with an ex-

pression of face which would have puzzled Lavater himself to analyse and define.

Mr. Ramsay rang the bell in the drawing-room, and on Mrs. Mason making her appearance, inquired if Mrs. Ramsay was still in her bedroom.

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Tell her I should like to see her, if she has sufficiently recovered from her indisposition.’

In a few minutes Ethel entered the room. She still bore traces of the excitement she had undergone in her interview with Lawson in the north tower. Her face was very pale, and her eyes were swollen, as if with weeping.

‘Sit down, Ethel. I wish to ask you a question or two.’

Ethel complied, with an inward misgiving that these questions had probably some reference to her relations with Lawson.

‘How long have you known our late guest, Mr. Lawson?’

‘ How long ? ’

Mr. Ramsay bowed, and waited patiently for her reply ; but no reply came from those white and trembling lips. At length Mr. Ramsay spoke again.

‘ You knew him before you went to live with Miss Bagster at Homewood ? ’

After a pause, during which the agitation of Ethel increased, came the answer,—

‘ I did ! ’

‘ He proposed to you. In fact, was a suitor for your hand ? ’

‘ He was ; but I refused him twice. ’

Ethel did not explain that the second refusal was after she was secretly married to Mr. Ramsay. But the words were spoken without any deliberate intention to deceive.

‘ Why did you not tell me he was an old lover ? ’

It was almost in an indignant tone that Ethel replied,—

‘ What would you have thought if I had

acted so towards yourself? If I had told Mr. Lawson that I had refused *you*? You, yourself, asked me as a favour not to tell even Miss Bagster that you had made me an offer of your hand!’

‘True, true,’ replied Ramsay, somewhat mollified. ‘I am quite satisfied of *your* honesty. I will not inquire too curiously as to the cause of your sudden indisposition this morning in the north tower, although I have my own ideas on the subject. I do not think Mr. Lawson will ever trouble you with any renewal of his vows (of course I am now speaking of the period anterior to your marriage), and—’

‘You have not told him you know of his former love for me?’ eagerly inquired Ethel.

‘I have not. I merely submitted an imaginary case for his opinion, and explained the summary process *I* should adopt if I see sufficient cause for extreme measures. That process does not concern you, Ethel.

So let me beg of you to dismiss this matter from your thoughts, and lie down for an hour or two. I will compound you a sedative. You know what a capital medicine man I am. I took my degree in the swamps of Panama, among the Indians and Mexicans. The lives of those I saved will, I hope, count as a set-off against those I was compelled to take with my old friend, the revolver there.'

After Ethel had left the room, Mr. Ramsay mused for a brief space.

'No, I will not tell her to-day. Poor girl, her nerves are too unstrung. But before this week expires she shall know that I revoke the promise I made to her sister as to periodical visits to London. As opportunity makes the thief, so temptation makes the sinner!'





CHAPTER IX.

MRS. BROWN AT HOME.

IT is the evening of the Private View Day at the Royal Academy, and Mrs. Brown has a little dinner in Leinster Square. We use the word 'little' advisedly, inasmuch as the number at Mrs. Brown's hospitable table is limited to four—the host and hostess, and Grace and Edwin Gordon. For the artful Carrie has devised a most cunning plot, and this is the evening destined for its accomplishment.

When Mrs. Brown suggested to Algernon the brilliant notion which had come forth from her brain, like Minerva fully armed from the brain of Jove, her lord and master offered no opposition.

‘I am morally certain,’ observed Mrs. Brown, ‘that Grace loves Edwin Gordon, and has done so these three years past, and I have a “leetle” suspicion that Edwin is beginning to care for Grace. Both their pictures are well hung, and on the evening of the Private View we will have them here, full of excitement and art enthusiasm. You shall be summoned away by an unexpected letter, and I will leave the room also to consult with you on this unforeseen business, and then we must leave the rest to fate.’

Accordingly the conspirators and victims are now assembled at the four sides of the dinner-table in Leinster Square. The faces of both Grace and Edwin are radiant, for their praises are in every mouth, and the daily press are nearly unanimous as to the merits of Belial and Glaucus and Ione.

So it is with a hearty laugh that they respond to the toast proposed by Algernon,

—‘The Hanging Committee.’ For of course the chance had been run of either being ‘skyed’ or ‘floored,’ although, as both the subjects were in the grand style, they could scarcely have been hid from the public gaze.

Grace has a happier expression on her face this evening than has been witnessed since that fatal night when her father disappeared from mortal ken. Her visit to Ethel at the Grange has removed to a certain extent the fears and forebodings she had entertained regarding her sister’s prospects of happiness.

Her ambition has been gratified as an artist, and the prevailing topic these few weeks has been the merits and character of her forthcoming picture. And, as Algernon slyly observes, with a malicious twinkle of the eye,—

‘What judgment the critics have shown! Did you see that laudatory notice in this

morning's 'Sun?' I wonder who can have written it? I cannot recognise the style!

Upon which Mrs. Brown threatens him with her fan, and begs him not to be egotistical.

'By-the-bye,' continues Brown, 'I saw Tom Richardson at the view to-day. I had nearly said poor Tom, but he is no longer that. His comedies are a fortune to him, and at the Albion he is king!'

'The Albion?' inquired his wife.

'Yes, my dear, the Albion! A celebrated tavern and supper room near Drury Lane. There he may be seen at the hour "when churchyards yawn and graves give up—"'

'My dear!' interposed his spouse.

'Well, at midnight he may be seen surrounded by an admiring circle, who listen to the opinions which fall from his lips with as much veneration as did the literary circle who worshipped Johnson at the Mitre in the last century. I showed

him your picture, Grace, and told him that was the work of the little girl whose sister made so promising a first appearance as Diana Vernon some three years ago, when he, the great dramatist, played Dougal in Rob Roy of that ilk.'

'But we will adjourn to the drawing-room—we will not be guilty on this occasion of after-dinner potations—and Edwin here shall give us a song.'

Gordon was gifted with an admirable method and sympathetic tenor voice, and he sang Burns' song—'My love is like a red, red rose,' in capital style. As he sang, the melody brought up from the past to the mind of Grace the night of the *tableaux vivans*, when Edwin had sung the same song, and the recollections of the three years' cares and struggles which had taken place since that happy evening brought tears to her eyes in spite of herself.

Gordon sat down on the chair beside her,

and murmured some few words of apology. 'Now,' thought Mrs. Brown, 'if this imaginary epistle would arrive, all might be as we wish.' When lo! a loud rat-tat that echoed through the house was heard, and the servant brought a letter to Mr. Brown, marked immediate. He hastily read it, and his hand shook, and his face blanched, and his admiring spouse thought what an admirable actor her husband would have made, had the fates not willed that he should act as instructor of the public on matters political, literary, and artistic ; at all events, to that large section of the community who do not care to take the trouble to think for themselves. Algernon arose and paced the room, and at length begged his guests to excuse him, as the letter he had just received required his immediate attention.

'How well he does it,' mentally exclaimed Mrs. Brown.

‘And—Carrie—I should like to speak with you before I leave the house.’

‘Certainly, my dear,’ eagerly exclaimed Mrs. Brown, and with an apologetic smile she followed the retreating Algernon.

‘Grace, dear Grace,’ exclaimed Gordon, ‘pardon me for the word. You remember, I daresay, my asking permission to address you by your Christian name, on that happy evening which I fear my ill-timed song has called to your recollection.

‘Happy evening!’ echoed Grace, with a faint smile: ‘Was it so happy for Edwin Gordon? I thought you seemed the reverse of happy when I spoke to you in the ante-room.’

‘True, true,’ rejoined Gordon, with some confusion of manner; ‘you are, of course, aware that it was on that occasion that my suit was rejected by your sister. But you perceive I have survived it. You know Shakespeare declares that men do not die

for love ; nay, it sometimes happens that that which we consider our heaviest trouble contains the seed of our greatest happiness in some future period of time. You will, perhaps, say this observation is ungallant ; but I cannot hide from myself, I cannot conceal from the sister of Ethel, that if my suit had prospered on that occasion three years since, it would not have been to the happiness of either Ethel or myself. We were not suited for each other. Grace, *dear* Grace, may I speak ? I love you ! You cannot have been blind to my devotion, to the ardent affection with which you have inspired me. Tell me, may I hope ?'

As Grace listened to the delicious words, as her senses yielded to the enchantment of feeling herself beloved by the only man capable of creating a sentiment of passion in her breast, and Edwin gently stole his arm around her slender waist, and his last words fell entreatingly upon her ear, how her heart

yearned to return the embrace, to rest her cheek against his own, and confess that he, and he alone, had possessed her heart for years ; that her whole future life was bound up in his ! But the speech of Gordon had unfortunately revived too keenly the picture of *Ethel's lover*. She felt that his love had only descended like manna from heaven upon her, when Ethel, his first love, was totally beyond his reach ! Had these burning words been uttered three short years ago, how joyfully would she have welcomed them ! But now, when a confession she had sometimes dreamed of had come to pass, she felt there was no alternative but to dash the cup of happiness from her lips, however painful might be the task. Art ! divine art ! must be her companion—the object of her idolatry—for the remainder of her life ! So it was with a pale cheek and trembling lips she faltered forth,—

‘ No, Edwin, it must not be. I could not

marry one who had professed love for my sister, and whom that sister had refused !’

Grace withdrew from the half-embrace of Edwin, and sat down by the pianoforte ; so when Mrs. Brown returned full of apologies for her unavoidable absence, Edwin was seated near the window in an attitude of deep despondency, and Grace at a considerable distance mechanically turning over the music which lay upon the piano.

‘ Hey - dey, Mr. Gordon ! your amusing powers seem sadly at a discount to-day ! Cannot you entertain an old friend like Miss Beaumont for a while. I am sorry Algernon has to leave us. Really the wife of a literary man has almost as much to put up with as a doctor’s wife ! She never knows when she can count upon his presence at the domestic hearth.’

Mrs. Brown bustled about, and hunted up favourite songs, and chatted, and

repeated some of her husband's anecdotes ; but all in vain, a spell seemed to have fallen upon her guests during her brief absence from the room, and presently Edwin took his departure.

Grace looked up in his face as he took her hand, with a glance in which love and regret and tenderness were strangely mingled, and bade him good-bye.

Mrs. Brown followed Gordon to the hall, and in a whisper said,—

‘ Tell me, Edwin, has anything passed between you and Grace this evening ? You must forgive the question, Edwin ; but you know how I love Grace, and how much interest I take in your welfare.’

‘ This only has passed, Mrs. Brown, I have proposed to Grace.’

‘ And she ?’ eagerly inquired Mrs. Brown.

‘ She has refused me !’



CHAPTER X.

THE POCKET-BOOK.

NEVER as Algernon Brown is admitted to be by every one who knows him, the reader will scarcely allow him the possession of those histrionic abilities with which he was credited by Mrs. Brown!

The agitation he displayed on receiving the letter which caused his sudden retreat from the dinner-party was genuine and sincere. The following was the purport of the missive :—

‘DEAR SIR,—I have come across an extraordinary clue respecting the missing pocket-book of the late Mr. Beaumont. I

do not think a moment should be lost if any good is to be done. Could you run over to Chelsea as soon as you receive this, and we will talk the matter over?—
Yours, etc.,D. W.'

The mind of Brown was made up on the instant, and telling his wife that the letter he held in his hand was really of an important nature, and not of the fictitious character which it had been arranged should arrive, he hailed the first cab he saw, and in a very short space was in the presence of Mr. Daniel Woodman.

Seated in his little parlour, with a cigar in his mouth, and a spirit bottle and glasses before him, he shook hands with Algernon, and pushed the cigar box towards him and bade him help himself. Inwardly hoping that the cigar might prove to be genuine Virginia, and not Whitechapel — Brown followed the example of the ex-detective,

and listened intently to the story which Mr. Woodman proceeded to relate. This was simply the history of his acquaintance with Simpson, and the statement made by the lawyer's clerk, that he knew of the whereabouts of the missing pocket-book.

‘That pocket-book we must have at any cost,’ emphatically exclaimed Brown.

Mr. Woodman nodded assent.

‘What plan do you suggest?’ resumed Brown.

‘I propose that you should accompany me to the ‘Spotted Dog’ to-morrow evening. We will tell him candidly that you are a friend of the late Mr. Beaumont; that you are much interested in this pocket-book; that you are willing to pay handsomely for a peep even at the contents.’

‘And how will you explain your interest in the affair?’ inquired Brown.

‘Well, if the worst comes to the worst, I must tell him who I am, and what I am.’

There's no help for it, and no disgrace in it, as I can see. I suppose you are prepared to tip him pretty well, either for a sight of the book or possession of the contents, if they should appear worth your while ?'

'What puzzles me is, that Simpson should never have tumbled to the reward which was offered for the book at the time of Mr. Beaumont's disappearance. But, however, I dare say there is a reason for that, if we knew all.'

After some further details, it was settled that Woodman should meet Simpson at six o'clock, at the 'Spotted Dog,' as arranged, on the following evening ; that Brown should be within call, so as to appear at the proper moment as the gentleman who was so anxious to have a glance at the pocket-book of the late Mr. Beaumont.

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On the following morning, Mr. Simpson

was duly engaged at his ordinary duties, occasionally stopping from his work of engrossing deeds to refresh himself from a large glass bottle, which contained the liquid known as 'Old Tom,' and which formed the favourite beverage of the lawyer's clerk. Mr. Lawson was not expected to-day. And as the callers were few and far between, Mr. Simpson was on this occasion indulging more than was customary or prudent.

There was another reason for this proceeding, viz., the unsettled state of Mr. Simpson's nerves, consequent upon the near approach of the suburban meeting, when it was to be decided whether Nancy or Waxy would win the stakes. Every farthing which Simpson could borrow or spare from his salary had been invested on Waxy to win absolutely. And should this anticipation prove a failure, the consequences to Mr. Simpson would be disastrous indeed. In fact, the bare contemplation of such an

occurrence gave him a cold shiver, mingled with visions of a dive from the neighbouring embankment. He was unable to back Nancy for a place, as the odds against the two horses were respectively as follows :—2 to 1 against Nancy ; 10 to 1 against Waxy. And the opinion of the erudite Mark was, that unless Waxy was first, he would, in sporting parlance, be nowhere ! So it was that, in order to steady his nerves and drown apprehensions, Mr. Simpson had recourse to the stimulating liquid we have mentioned. He had just taken a fifth instalment from the bottle, when his ear recognised a well-known footstep on the stairs, and Mr. Lawson made his appearance.

‘ Good morning, Simpson.’

‘ Good morning, sir.’

‘ Any letters ?’

‘ Two, sir ; they are on your table.’

Mr. Lawson glanced suspiciously at his clerk, whose speech was rather thick, and

whose progress across the room as he opened the door of the inner room was of that description which may be called meandering. However, Mr. Lawson entered his room, sat down, and read his letters.

‘Simpson!’

‘Yes, sir!’

In his hurry to reply to the call of his master, the clerk stumbled and fell. Picking himself up as quickly as possible, he answered the summons, and stood with one hand leaning on the table, while the other was thrust gracefully in the breast of his coat. Mr. Lawson stared at his clerk for a moment, then in sharp incisive tones exclaimed,—

‘You have been drinking, Simpson!’

‘Not exactly, sir!’

‘But I can smell it, sir! Leave the room this instant, or, stay, I will look over it this time; but if it occurs again, you can seek another situation.’

Mr. Simpson simpered as he replied,—

‘I will leave the room, but I will *not* look out for another situation.’

‘What do you mean, sir? Are you mad as well as drunk?’

‘Neither one nor t’other, sir, I do assure you.’

All the observations of Mr. Simpson, be it remembered, were spoken with great difficulty, and in a very thick tone of voice, and he was compelled to balance himself with one hand on the table during the process. Mr. Lawson contemplated his clerk with increasing astonishment.

‘I have wanted to say a few words, Mr. Lawson, for some consid—some considerable time, about a missing pocket-book. I’ve got it under lock and key—Mr.—Mr. Beaumont’s.’

Lawson felt the very marrow of his bones chill with horror as he listened to the last words of his clerk. He was then, if Simp-

son spoke truth, in the power of his drunken clerk. Fortunately the condition of Simpson prevented him from perceiving the effect of his words upon his master, whose cheeks were blanched with terror as he thought of the possibilities of his discovery. But he replied, with all the calmness he could muster,—

‘I remember there was a reward of £20 for this self-same book, but this was withdrawn after the lapse of a twelvemonth. Let me see the book, Simpson. Have you got it with you?’

Simpson smiled mysteriously, and, placing his finger against his nose, replied,—

‘It is quite safe—I do—assure you.’

‘Very well, Simpson, you can please yourself. It is no business of mine. But to return to your conduct. As I said before, I have no wish to press hardly upon you. You have hitherto been a very steady, sober clerk, but it is useless to deny that

this morning you have been anticipating your evening libations ; now I cannot run the risk of any of my clients seeing you in this condition, therefore I must ask you to lie down on the sofa in the inner room, and you will, doubtless, in the course of an hour or two, awake in your usual condition.'

'Well, sir,' resumed Simpson, somewhat mollified by this treatment, 'I confess I've been a good deal worried lately, and have taken a little drop too much perhaps this morning, so will do as you wish.'

'That's right,' said Lawson, 'like a sensible fellow, and I'll turn the key on you, so there will be no chance of your being disturbed. Come, in you go.'

So saying, Lawson assisted Simpson to the sofa in the inner room, and having locked the door, took up his position at the desk of his clerk. Then the features of Lawson betrayed the agony of his mind, as he pondered on the means to obtain

possession of the pocket-book. He lifted up the lid of his clerk's desk, but it contained nothing but the ordinary requirements of an office. There was a corner cupboard in the room, but the door was locked.

Lawson returned to the inner room. Simpson was in a sound slumber, and snoring in a most portentous manner. Gently inserting his hand in the trousers-pocket of his clerk, Lawson withdrew therefrom a bunch of keys. He returned rapidly to the office, taking the precaution to re-lock the door between the two rooms, and opened the door of the corner cupboard. Turning aside various papers—a fire assurance policy, a life assurance ditto, and other similar documents, which Simpson kept in his office for better security, the hand of Lawson clutched *the* pocket-book. Yes, there was the well-known pocket-book of the late Mr. Beaumont. Rapidly opening it, his finger alighted

on an oblong piece of paper, folded in four divisions. Ah! it was—it was *the receipt!*

Lawson almost shrieked as he ran his eye over the well-remembered document. Yes, there it was. The acknowledgment in Lawson's handwriting, and signed by him, of the deposit of certain bonds of the South American Republics, to serve as security for a loan of ten thousand pounds, which Lawson had promised to negotiate at a lower rate of interest than that chargeable at that date in the City.

These bonds were payable to bearer, and passed from hand to hand like scrip, as Lawson knew too well; for, had not the proceeds long ago found their way to the pockets of the gentlemen of the ring.

Extracting the receipt, Lawson replaced the pocket-book, locked the door of the corner cupboard, and then, as cautiously as possible, returned the bunch of keys to the pocket of the still slumbering Simpson.

Again locking the communicating door, Lawson lit a wax taper, and holding the receipt in the flame thereof, slowly consumed it and reduced it to ashes—his countenance resembling that of Mephistophles watching the succumbing of Faust to the charms of Marguerite while he did so.

In the space of an hour and a-half Simpson woke up, and expressed great penitence; Lawson, warning him sternly against any repetition of similar conduct—took his departure with a lighter heart than he had known for years.

If only his turf speculations should succeed, and Mr. Ramsay be gathered to his fathers, Lawson owned to himself that he should be the happiest of men, for Ethel might still be his wife! Yes, affairs certainly seemed to wear a more promising aspect.

In the meantime, Simpson was endea-

vouring to remember the gist of his conversation with Mr. Lawson prior to his slumber. But his efforts were fruitless. He knew he had mentioned the pocket-book. He hoped that Mr. Lawson would attribute his communication to the wanderings of a mind disordered by drink, for he did not wish to play his trump card as yet—the same being his knowledge of the deposit of foreign securities in the hands of Lawson by Mr. Beaumont on the night of his disappearance.

But he must prepare for his appointment with Mr. Daniel at the ‘Spotted Dog’ at six o’clock this evening. It was now nearly five, so he resolved to close the office, and have a ‘meat tea’—a combination which would help to clear his brain of the confusion which still existed therein. So precisely at six o’clock Mr. Simpson made his appearance at the ‘Spotted Dog,’ spruce and clear-headed, and altogether different to

the obtuse and muddle-headed individual of that morning.

He found Mr. Daniel in his accustomed place, with the usual paraphernalia before him. After the customary salutations, Mr. Simpson was invited to choose his refreshment, and, on the principle of not mixing your liquors, selected the spirit which had so overcome his self-command in the morning. But he was very abstemious, and carefully protracted the consumption of the tumbler in front of him.

Mr. Daniel perceived that if any business was to be done, it would have to be done, not when Philip was drunk, but when Philip was sober. So he opened the trenches at once, and without any circumvention.

‘Mr. Simpson, I am a candid and an honest man, as you know. When we last met in this place, you told me you knew where the late Mr. Beaumont’s pocket-book was to be found. I chanced to mention this

fact to a very particular friend of mine, who knew the Beaumont family, and he is prepared to come down handsome, not only for the book itself, but for merely a peep at it. There, now you have a chance of claiming a tidy swag with remarkably little trouble.'

'Who is this gentleman?' said Simpson, in a suspicious tone.

'Oh, you shall see him,' replied Daniel. 'All fair and above board. He is in the bar at this moment!'

Simpson rose to his feet and seized his hat. 'Oh, I see, this then is a regular plant!'

'Sit down, man; there is no plant at all about it,' resumed Daniel. 'You have known me long enough, haven't you, to feel safe with me?'

Mr. Simpson slowly and dubiously resumed his seat, with a very grave expression of countenance.

'Shall I call him in?' said Daniel, with a jerk of his clay pipe towards the bar.

‘If you like,’ sullenly replied Simpson.

Daniel strode to the door of the parlour.

‘Walk in, sir.’

Algernon Brown entered the room and took his seat at the table.

The suspicions of Simpson were proportionately increased as soon as he set eyes on Brown; for, although Brown was the reverse of a dandy, yet he was so evidently a gentleman—and a shrewd one to boot—that Simpson felt that it behoved him to exercise all his caution in the interview which was to follow.

‘Mr. Simpson,’ began Algernon Brown, ‘Mr. Daniel has given me to understand that you have in your possession a certain pocket-book which once belonged to my late friend, Mr. Beaumont. I will give you five pounds merely to inspect the same; and twenty for possession of the book, if it contains any documentary evidence which may be of value to the representatives of Mr.

Beaumont. Your acceding to my request cannot possibly do you harm, and is certain to do you good—assuming, as I do, that you are not indifferent to these likenesses of Her Most Gracious Majesty.’

Mr. Brown took some sovereigns from his waistcoat pocket as he spoke, and laid them on the table. The sight of the gold aroused the acquisitive instinct of the lawyer’s clerk, as Brown expected.

Simpson glanced nervously at the door. ‘We are all tiled here? Well, I can put my hand on a book which contains something which would be cheap at ten times the money you offer!’

‘May I inquire, Mr. Simpson, why you have delayed all these years—nearly three—without making capital of your important discovery?’

‘Because I haven’t had the book three weeks. I found it by accident between the wainscoting and the wall of the staircase.

Mr. Beaumont must have dropped it on the night he called at Mr. Lawson's. Our offices are very old, sir, and full of chinks and crevices.'

'Where is this book, Mr. Simpson?'

'Well — er — I — you quite understand gentlemen, that I have only had it three weeks!'

'Oh yes; that is quite understood.'

'Well, I generally keep it at the office, alongside of my policies—in case of fire, you know; but on account of something that happened this morning I have it with me.'

'Indeed!' exclaimed both Brown and Daniel, in great excitement.

'Now, in this pocket-book there is a receipt of Mr. Lawson's for a large amount of foreign stock, which Mr. Beaumont left with Mr. Lawson to raise ten thousand pounds upon. Now, I think that is worth more than twenty pounds, gentlemen.'

'One moment, Mr. Simpson,' resumed

Brown, in a very decided tone. ‘In retaining that book one day after its discovery, you have rendered yourself liable to criminal proceedings. As clerk to a solicitor, I need not tell *you* that; but as I do not wish to depart from anything I have said, I will increase the sum of twenty pounds to fifty pounds as soon as I am in possession of that receipt.’

‘Very well, gentlemen, I only wish to do what is right; so here is the pocket-book, and here is the receipt.’

Simpson produced the pocket-book as he spoke, and hastily undid the clasp, and felt for the receipt—both Brown and Daniel waiting in breathless anxiety for its production.

Suddenly the face of Simpson became pale as death, his hands shook, so that they could scarcely hold the book. He gave a loud cry as he threw the book on the table, and shrieked,—

‘Gone!’ Then covered his face with his hands, and sobbed aloud.

Brown seized the book, turned the leaves rapidly over, examined all the pockets, but no separate paper rewarded his search.

Simpson now rose from his seat in great excitement, and clutching Brown by the arm, in a hoarse whisper exclaimed,—

‘I see it all! Lawson—yes—while I was asleep in the office, after I had told him, robbed me of my keys. He—he has got the receipt, and I have lost fifty pounds! No human being will ever see that receipt again. ’Tis gone for ever!’

Brown made no attempt to conceal his disappointment, and Mr. Daniel looked the personification of perplexity. Brown laid down on the table five new sovereigns.

‘There is my part of the contract, Mr. Simpson. Now we must pull together, and we shall yet foil this worthy solicitor. You can, of course, swear that you have seen such

a document as that you have described to us. Whether that will suffice, I am not sufficiently a lawyer to form an opinion—*nous verrons.*'

Simpson carefully placed the money in his pocket, and was now gradually recovering from the effects of the shock. But he could not forget that Lawson had robbed him of fifty pounds, which invested at 10 to 1 on the winner of the stakes at Epsom, would have resulted in five hundred pounds! He mentally vowed revenge!

'In the meantime,' pursued Brown, 'here is my card. This gentleman, whom you have hitherto known as Mr. Daniel, is Mr. Daniel Woodman, private inquiry agent, sometime chief detective at the Mansion House!'





CHAPTER XI.

EASTHOPE JUNCTION.

TWO days after the little dinner in Leinster Square, Grace was hard at work in her studio, recovered in some slight degree from the agitation which the proposal of Edwin Gordon had caused in her breast, when a letter was delivered by her maid, the address of which was in printed characters—a circumstance which created some surprise as to the correspondent who chose to adopt this unusual and laborious mode of caligraphy.

On opening the envelope, the following words, also in printed characters, were found :—

‘MADAM,—The enclosed is a true copy of a note from Mr. Lawson to Mrs. Ramsay.—
Yours, etc.,A FRIEND.’

A small piece of tissue or copying paper fell to the ground. Grace picked it up, and hastily read as follows :—

‘MY DARLING ETHEL,—I have arranged everything. Be at Easthope Junction at eight o’clock on Wednesday evening next. I must come by the train which reaches the junction at half-past eight; so you had better wait my arrival in the first-class waiting-room till that time. Adieu till then.—Your devoted lover,
GEORGE LAWSON.

‘P.S.—Mrs. Mason will give you this letter, as arranged.’

Grace read and re-read the note again and again. There was no doubt as to the authenticity of the communication. The handwriting of Lawson was too well-known

to her, for her to doubt that fact for a moment. How could this copy have been obtained? Lawson must be surrounded by spies and enemies.

Ethel had then succumbed to the arts and temptations of the wily lawyer, and was about to bring fresh disgrace on the already tainted name of Beaumont by a clandestine flight from her husband and her home! And the companion of her flight the enemy of their house, and one who was perhaps cognisant of her father's mysterious end!

What day was this? Wednesday! The very day. Not a moment was to be lost if her sister was to be saved.

Hastily consulting the columns of a Bradshaw, Grace discovered that a train which left London at five would reach the junction at seven. There was no other train which would enable Grace to intercept her sister, and so save her honour and her good name. It was now four.

There was just time to dress and catch the five o'clock train for Easthope Junction.

The toilette arrangements of Grace were at all times a brief performance, so in less than a quarter of an hour she was *en route* for the Metropolitan Station. During the two hours' journey, her one thought was Ethel. Her memory strayed back to the days when they were children together, ever the best of friends and the pleasantest of companions! Grace was not blind to the faults of her sister, to her innate unconscious selfishness; her vanity; her lack of industry; but withal she was loving and affectionate to those about her, and regarded Grace as a superior being, who was never wrong, and whose judgment never erred. Grace had no doubt that, from the lucky accident of the train which conveyed Ethel from the station nearest the Grange arriving half-an-hour earlier than that which brought Lawson, she would

be enabled to exercise her old influence over her younger sister, and save her from disgrace and shame. But here was the station at Easthope, and Grace had an hour to wait — and this was the most trying portion of the ordeal she was compelled to undergo. While Grace was preparing for her journey, speeding to the railway in a hansom, and flying past fields and villages in a special train, the movement accorded with the impatient character of her emotions; but now with nothing to contemplate but the long line of rails, the deserted station — with one sleepy porter dozing on a seat on the platform — the suspense was almost unbearable.

Slowly the hand of the station clock moved on towards the hour of eight, and as the hour chimed, the signal bell was heard, and the smoke of the coming train appeared in the distance. Grace felt her heart beat as though it would break

through its surroundings, at the thought that that advancing train contained her only sister flying from home, and honour, and her good name. Grace hastily pulled her fall over her face, and partially concealing herself behind a part of the wood-work of the station, awaited the on-coming train.

The sleepy porter awoke, and vigorously swinging the large bell, vociferated ‘Easthope,’ as if it were the most important station in the kingdom.

Only one passenger alighted. Ethel! Her descent from the train was attended by an infinity of boxes—large and small—which taxed the energy of the solitary porter as he removed them from the luggage van, and then Ethel entered the first-class waiting-room. Grace instantly followed.

Ethel had not time to seat herself, when she was confronted by her sister. ‘Grace!

was the one word which escaped from her lips, and then her limbs slowly gave way beneath her, and it was with great difficulty Grace could save her sister from falling. Gently placing Ethel on the couch, Grace filled a glass with water from the decanter on the table, and in a few seconds the colour returned to the cheeks of Ethel, and she directed an anxious and inquiring look towards her sister. Instinctively she felt that one cause, and one cause alone, could have brought her sister to so remote a place as Easthope Junction. And that cause was the discovery, by some means unknown, of her intended flight with Lawson.

Grace spoke not ; but gazed with sad and melancholy eyes upon her trembling sister.

Presently Ethel mustered courage enough to speak.

‘What brings you here, Grace?’

‘I must ask that question of *you*, Ethel. Why have you left the Grange, your husband, and your home? Whom do you expect to meet here in half-an-hour? Ethel, I know all. I have read Lawson’s note to you. Oh! Ethel, dear, that was a bitter moment for a sister to read that testimony to an only sister’s disgrace and guilt.’

An angry flush mounted to the cheek of Ethel, and she rose from her seat.

‘Guilt! You have no right to use that word to me, Grace!’

‘Have you not left the Grange in compliance with a request from Lawson?’ rejoined Grace.

‘I have left the Grange, I confess, and under the direction of Lawson. He sympathised with my isolated position. Mr. Ramsay has even interdicted my coming to London to visit the only sister I have in the world. What woman would submit to such treatment?’

A mode of saving Ethel here flashed across the mind of Grace, and she determined to utilise the idea at once, especially as there was not much time to lose, Lawson's train being due in half-an-hour. Throwing her arms round Ethel, Grace wept bitter tears upon her shoulder.

‘Oh, Ethel, darling! I have not come here to humiliate you, to cause the blush of shame to rise to your cheek. I have come here to save you; not so much from Lawson, as from yourself! You were always a child of impulse, darling! and ever trusted your sister Grace, your counsellor and adviser in all things. Trust her *now*, dear. Do exactly as I shall dictate, and all will yet be well!’

Ethel's tears flowed fast, and her hands shook so much that Grace could scarcely hold them. At length came the words, sobbed forth by the repentant Ethel,—

‘I do trust you, Gracie, dear. I will—do—exactly as you wish.’

Grace kissed the wet cheeks again and again, and then gently led her forth to the platform. And having directed the porter to label the luggage ‘London,’ placed her sister in a London train, which was waiting at another platform till the hour struck for its departure—nine o’clock. As Grace closed the door of the carriage upon her sister, Ethel ejaculated in tones of alarm,—

‘Are you not coming, dear?’

‘Yes; but I must first see Lawson.’

‘Oh no, Grace! not for the world!’

‘Fear not, Ethel. I will work no evil; not even to him.’

Grace paused not to discuss the question with Ethel further; for the train by which Lawson was to arrive was already signalled, and her object was to be in the first-class waiting-room prior to that event. Grace had scarcely taken her seat in a dark corner

of the room, and put down her fall over her face, when the train dashed up to the platform. A moment afterwards a quick step was heard, and Lawson walked rapidly into the room.

‘Ethel, my darling! we meet at last.’

Grace rose to her feet, and throwing back her veil, Lawson beheld, instead of the weak, erring Ethel Ramsay, the pale, resolute features of Grace Beaumont! He staggered back, as if he had received a pistol-shot.

‘Miss Beaumont!’

‘I am not the sister you expected to find, Mr. Lawson. It was Ethel, the *wife* of your benefactor, your employer, whom you were endeavouring to decoy here,—the *daughter* of your old friend, my poor, dead father!’

Lawson sank on to a seat apparently dumbfounded; all his *savoir-faire* having completely deserted him. Presently he stammered forth,—

‘Where is Ethel? I mean Mrs. Ramsay?’

‘Safe in my keeping, till I deliver her up to her legal protector—her husband.’

‘You, at all events, Miss Beaumont, are not her legal protector. Mrs. Ramsay is a married woman, and her husband is the only person who can control her actions.’

‘I am Mrs. Ramsay’s elder sister, her only sister, and I am now acting by her express commands and dictation. You would not attempt to remove my sister by force?’

Lawson had rapidly reviewed all the circumstances of the case, and resolved, like a good general, to beat a retreat.

‘You are right, Miss Beaumont; you are mistress of the situation, and I acknowledge myself defeated. Over-sympathy with the unhappy position of your poor sister, married to an old man, condemned to a lonely existence in that dreary solitude, the Grange—

all this, I say, combined with the deep love I have ever entertained for her, induced me to suggest a course of conduct which my calmer reason disapproves. Forgive me, Miss Beaumont ; let us shake hands.'

Taking no notice of the lawyer's extended hand, Grace resumed,—

'Before we part, I must have your promise that you deny all knowledge of my sister's intended flight with yourself.'

'Most readily, Miss Beaumont.' Lawson smiled as he continued,—'I think even *you* will trust me so far. I am not likely to publish my own defeats, and offend a good patron like Mr. Ramsay into the bargain.'

Grace perfectly agreed with Lawson for once. But quietly ignoring his proffered hand, she left the waiting-room, merely observing as she did so,—

'Our interview is at an end, Mr. Lawson.'

Grace found Ethel in a state of great agitation, but speedily reassured her sister by telling her that Lawson had expressed profound regret for his conduct, and pledged himself to inviolable secrecy. Neither Grace nor Ethel conversed much from this point, and in due course the sisters were safely 'landed' (to use a Scotticism) at Miss Belmour's house in St. John's Wood.

As soon as they entered the hall, they were informed by the servant that Mr. Ramsay was in the drawing-room, and had been waiting there nearly an hour. Ethel trembled, and appeared ready to faint, but Grace pressed her hand, and said in a firm tone, 'Leave all to me,' and then escorted Ethel to her own room.

Without waiting a moment, Grace descended to the drawing-room and gave Mr. Ramsay a cordial greeting.

'This is rather a singular hour to call upon a young lady, Miss Belmour, even although

that lady be one's sister-in-law ; but I hope the urgency of my business will serve as my excuse.'

'Pray don't apologise, Mr. Ramsay. I think I know the object of this late call.'

'I am very much afraid you do not, Miss Belmour. In one word, I have come in search of Ethel—my wife.'

'Where should she be, Mr. Ramsay, but under her sister's roof ?'

'Here!' exclaimed Ramsay, with an incredulous stare.

'Yes, Mr. Ramsay, she is at this moment in my room, recovering herself after the fatigues of the journey, and some excitement in consequence of that journey.'

'Then *you* knew of her intended visit to London, Miss Belmour?' exclaimed the puzzled Ramsay.

'Why, of course I did. How else could I have met her, and escorted her here. I do not wish to excuse my sister's conduct,

further than I was under the impression that, when I paid my visit to the Grange, it was an understood thing that Ethel should occasionally pay visits to her sister in London. She is still very young, and, acting on a momentary but strong impulse, my sister determined to take French leave, and pay a visit to her sister.'

Mr. Ramsay gave an incredulous cough, as he drily remarked,—

'And judging by the number of boxes Mrs. Ramsay took with her, she evidently intended that her visit should be a long one.'

'I must ask you, Mr. Ramsay, not to see my sister till the morning. Her nervous system has received a great shock, and a few hours' quiet will restore her better than anything else.'

So Ethel did not appear till breakfast next morning, when she entered the dining-room, pale and tearful, and placidly accepted the kiss of reconciliation which Mr. Ramsay im-

printed on her cheek. He tacitly consented to Ethel remaining a week or two with Grace. Observing that it would otherwise be very regrettable that so much trouble and expense should be uselessly incurred with respect to so enormous a quantity of luggage.

Whether Mr. Ramsay entirely believed the version given by Grace of her sister's sudden departure from the Grange, was never known by the sisters. Mr. Ramsay was in a way a practical philosopher, and knew it was sometimes for our good, and peace of mind, that we should be deceived as to certain matters.

The mystery of the copied letter was solved after a considerable interval of time. Simpson had been bribed by Woodman the detective to take copies of any private letters which might appear to affect the Beaumont family in any way. And on Woodman obtaining this letter he instantly forwarded a copy to Grace, with what results it has been the purport of this chapter to describe.



CHAPTER XII.

LAWSON AT BAY.

THE so-called humours of a race-course have been described so often, that there is very little now to be said or written on the subject. The gigantic kaleidoscope effects of Epsom, the fashion of Ascot, and the thorough horsiness of Doncaster, have all ‘been hymned by loftier harps than mine.’

The meeting where Nancy was to contend with Waxy for pre-eminence was held on some downs, not twenty miles from London, early in the merry month of May. The sun rose bright and warm on the day appointed ; and, as there had been an early spring, the hawthorn was full of blossom, and the lilacs

and laburnums in luxuriant beauty, on this morning of the most disappointing and treacherous month of the year ! There was an average attendance of company. The ring was full ; and the four-in-hands and carriages extended as far as the tan path over the course.

Mr. Lawson was early in the paddock, in close consultation with little Mark ; and Nancy looked the pink of perfection, with a coat as glossy as satin, and an eye as bright as that of a ballroom beauty. Waxy was also much admired ; but, beyond these, none of the animals engaged attracted any attention. The race was considered by the ring and public alike as simply a match between Waxy and Nancy. Nancy was first favourite, at even betting ; Waxy, 6 to 1 against him ; taken and offered. In the preliminary canters Nancy quite justified the opinion of the public and the sporting fraternity ; showing excellent temper, and mov-

ing with all the grace and freedom of a greyhound. Soon they were seen walking slowly towards the post—eight runners in all. Mr. Lawson had by this time completed his arrangements, had spoken his final words to his jockey, and taken up his position in the gallery of the Grand Stand. The sudden ringing of the bell announced that the field had been despatched at the first attempt, and the eight runners were seen in a compact body ascending the hill. When they emerged from behind the bushes, Nancy and Waxy were seen lying well to the rear, while the remaining competitors were making the running at a good pace.

As they come to the corner, the favourite and Waxy are a good three lengths in front of the field, and this distance is increased as they approach the bell.

The heart of Lawson beats high with joy and exultation—as he witnesses the realisa-

tion of his dearest hopes and carefully laid plans. Waxy, whom he has backed to win thousands, is sailing in apparently an easy winner, as, although he is only half a length in front of Nancy, the mare is being ridden by Little Mark, and appears in difficulties ; and as Lawson has betted heavily against his own animal, he, of course, stands to win on the mare losing.

The Grand Stand is reached ; the two contending horses mount the incline ; Waxy is now a clear length ahead, when lo ! the horse appears to stumble, and the mare canters in an easy winner of the stakes, and George Lawson is a ruined man !

The cause of the stumble is soon discovered. Waxy has broken a blood vessel. For a moment the whole scene swims before him ; he hears a singing in his ears, and for a brief moment he clings to the railing for support. But gathering himself together,

he collects his scattered faculties as best he can, and descends to the course below.

Here he is besieged by those well-informed members of the ring, who are cognisant of the fact that Mr. George Lawson and Mr. Temple, the owner of Nancy, are one and the same individual. Congratulations are showered upon him, and he has to grin a ghastly smile, and return the pressure of the hands of his wellwishers.

He has caught a glimpse of poor Little Mark for a moment, who telegraphs a look of sympathy and self-exoneration. But Lawson makes no response, but, watching his opportunity, wends his way to the station, and is in a few minutes whirling in an express train to London. He scarcely knows how or in what manner he reaches his offices in the Temple.

It is already growing dusk when he finds himself seated in a chair awaking from a heavy slumber. He looks at his watch—it

is eight o'clock—he must then have been asleep more than three hours.

The anxious days and sleepless nights of the last few weeks have told their tale, and nature demands a respite. His temples are aching, and his brain throbbing as though it would burst; and then the recollection of his hopeless and irretrievable position comes over him like an avalanche of calamity. He plunges his head into a basin of cold water, and this for a while allays in some slight degree the physical tortures he is suffering.

But there is nothing this world can produce that will alleviate in the smallest fraction of an atom the mental horrors which crowd his seared brain with ever-increasing horror. His own clerk, probably, at this moment conspiring in what way to bring him to the bar of a criminal court. Ethel lost to him for ever! Ethel, whom he had loved in riches and in poverty—with a deep

and an abiding passion—and now he had incurred liabilities which it was impossible he could ever discharge. His sporting debts he could repudiate, of course, with a loss of character and friends to be sure. But there was his heavy debt to Mr. Ramsay, the payment of which would be now enforced by the husband of Ethel. And there were other large amounts which he had relied upon his turf winnings to discharge.

There was only one course left him to pursue. He must fly! He must leave the country for a time at all events. While there was life there was hope. He was still a young man. There might yet be happy years in store for him. Ramsay was old; he could not live for ever. No; he would not utterly despair.

What was this? A note lying on the table, he had not perceived till now. He knew the handwriting.

‘DEAR SIR,—A warrant was taken out this morning at the Mansion House for your apprehension on a charge of fraud and embezzlement connected with the estate of the late Mr. Beaumont. Be warned in time.—Yours, A FRIEND.’

‘Ha! this is from poor old Thomson, clerk of the court, who thus repays the sundry tips he has received many a time and oft at my hands.’

This, then, completed the tale of woe about to descend upon the head of the unfortunate owner of Nancy. He had now no choice left. Immediate flight was the only alternative which remained. He examined his purse. It contained about fifty pounds. Hastily packing a small portmanteau, and making a rapid and superficial search among his papers, he proceeded to destroy all those documents which might tend in the slightest measure to criminate

him. This task occupied some two hours, so it was now nearly eleven o'clock.

Lawson was not of a poetical turn of mind, but as he watched the embers of the burnt papers, the sparks dying out one by one, he could not help mentally exclaiming,—

‘So perish all my hopes of happiness—all my hopes of Ethel! She will despise me—execrate me—when she discovers that I have squandered on the turf, among jockeys and blacklegs, the patrimony of her and her sister! Now all my future is as black as those ashes.’

Rousing himself by a violent effort, he approached the window and looked out. It was a bright moonlight night, and the fountain below plashed and rippled peacefully under the ‘moon’s watery beams,’ and the whole scene was calm and quiet, and in striking contrast to the thoughts which raged like an angry volcano through his brain.

Who were those three men in close converse at the end of the walk? Yes, one was Simpson, the other two men he did not know. They were engaged in earnest talk, occasionally glancing towards his chambers.

The mind of Lawson was made up on the instant. The outer and inner doors he found were locked, but as Simpson had keys of both, he placed some articles of heavy furniture against the inner door, and then examined the space behind the offices, in rear of his private room. His offices were on the second floor, and his room overlooked a small yard separated by a six-foot wall from the roadway.

While he was deliberating as to the mode he should adopt to descend into the yard, a loud knocking was heard at the outer door, and the voice of Simpson, asking admittance on some important business. Presently Simpson's voice was heard again,—

‘I know you are at home, sir ; I saw the light.’

He had seen the light from the blazing papers. There was no time to be lost. Lawson seriously contemplated for a moment attempting the descent by the water-pipe, when he suddenly recollected there was a piece of rope in the cupboard, which had served as the fastening to a box of whisky which had been sent him by a sporting friend from Scotland.

As he was searching for it, he heard the outer door of the office yielding under the united efforts of Mr. Simpson and his two colleagues.

Ah ! here was the rope. To tie one end of the rope to the leg of a large bureau was the work of a moment ; then, opening the window, he dropped the other end towards the ground, and then, working hand over hand, let himself down in safety.

As he climbed the wall which separated

the yard from the roadway, he heard the outer door of the office yield with a loud crash. He had taken the precaution to throw his portmanteau into the yard before descending, and now, with this in his hand, he fled as fast as possible to the Embankment, and took the train from the Temple Station for Paddington, where he arrived just as the midnight train was starting for the West of England.





CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE COTSWOLDS.

THOSE individuals who have not explored the romantic scenery to be found in the region of the Cotswold Hills, have a great treat in store. But in order to properly appreciate the picturesque, the observer must be in a different frame of mind to that possessed by Mr. George Lawson.

On the morning after his hasty departure from his chambers in the Temple, he found himself about five miles from Cheltenham, at the junction of four roads, and in front of him a small roadside inn, with a painting over the doorway of a balloon in mid air, from which the inn derived its name. Lawson

hesitated. He had a vague idea of reaching Bristol by some roundabout course, and taking ship to Ireland, and from thence to America. At all events, he would rest here awhile, refresh the inner man, and revolve anew his plans for leaving the country.

He entered the 'Balloon,' and, seating himself on the large oaken settle, called for some bread and cheese and ale. The latter was home-brewed, and therefore he was enabled to drink deep from the earthenware mug in which it was served, without fear as to the consequences. He only carried a small portmanteau, but the walk up Leckhampton Hill, in his present shattered condition of nerves, had in a measure fatigued him. He could not forbear contemplating with envy the comely young hostess in her cotton-print dress, engaged in sewing, wearing a white sun-bonnet, under which were the cheeks ruddy with health, and the eyes veiled with long lashes, fixed upon her

work. What worlds he would give to settle down here in some cottage, far from London and all its ambitions and intrigues, with Ethel as his companion! Yes, he felt that Eden itself would not be Paradise without Ethel!

But there was no time for weaving pictures of love and domestic peace. He must act at once, and that cautiously. He resolved to make particular inquiries as to the best mode of reaching Stroud, and when he arrived at the village of Birdlip, to descend the hill in the direction of Gloucester, and take the train to Bristol, so that, in the event of his being tracked to his present resting-place, his pursuers might be thrown off the scent.

After making careful inquiries and pencil memoranda as to the Stroud route, he rose to take his departure. Cheered by the rest and refreshment of which he had partaken, he paused when he had walked some hun-

dred yards, and contemplated the scene before him. Below him was the Vale of Gloucester, the square white tower of the cathedral distinctly visible above the haze of blue smoke which marked the position of the city. To the right the Malvern Hills broke the sky-line, while the Welsh mountains on the west formed the background to a small silver streak which denoted the Bristol Channel. The stillness was so intense that the voices of children in the village below, at the distance of a mile, were distinctly audible. All bespoke peace and calm, in striking contrast to the whirlpool of guilty passions which raged in the bosom of the lawyer. Fear, rage, hate, and despair contended for pre-eminence. But he must on, and reach Bristol as quickly as possible, so, invoking courage as his best ally, Lawson strode manfully forward at the rate of five miles an hour, and so arrived at the village of Birdlip.

About half-an-hour after Lawson had left the Balloon Inn, two men, hot and dusty with rapid walking, entered the common room of the inn. One of the men called for refreshment, while the other, in a tone of agitation which he made no attempt to conceal, inquired if a gentleman had passed that way within the last half-hour.

In a broad Gloucestershire dialect, which we make no attempt to reproduce in this place, for the reason that it would be completely non-understandable by the general reader, the hostess described the appearance of Lawson.

‘The very man!’ exclaimed the questioner in tones of deep mortification.

Both the men were dressed in dark-coloured clothes, and wore billycock hats, and were evidently men who lived in towns, and not in villages.

‘Has the gentleman done anything wrong? A civiller-spoken gentleman I never saw!’

‘Well, he’s wanted, Miss, very particularly by some gentlemen in London. They’ll settle the point whether he’s done anything wrong.’

As they consumed the cold meat and cheese, they questioned the hostess as to every word spoken by Lawson, shook their heads in a very dubious style when the road to Stroud was spoken about.

‘Ay! he’ll no gang to Stroud, or he would not have asked so particular about it. Well, good day, young woman.’

Tossing the reckoning on the table, they left the inn. Hardly had they emerged into the open air, when one of the men gripped his friend in the arm, and in a hoarse whisper said,—

‘If he doubles back on Gloster, Sandy, by G—d! Woodman has him as safe as a door nail!’

We will now return to Lawson, who, having reached Birdlip, carefully abstained

from calling at either of the noted taverns which crowned the summit of the hill, overlooking the road to Gloucester. Not that he doubted the quality of the entertainment provided by the respective hostelries, but he was anxious to leave no trace of his route. So turning to the left on the road to Stroud, he plunged into Witcomb wood, and, doubling to the right again, arrived on the road which leads to Gloucester.

Lawson strode vigorously forward, and had soon covered two miles of ground. There were still five miles to traverse, and on reference to a time-table which he carried in his pocket, he found that a train left Gloucester for Bristol in something less than an hour from the present time. So it was clearly impossible for him to arrive at Gloucester sufficiently early to catch that train.

However, he still marched on with unabated vigour, and presently overtook a

gentleman in a dogcart, who was proceeding in a leisurely manner in the direction of Gloucester city.

‘Do you happen to be driving as far as the city?’ inquired Lawson.

The stout, portly, agricultural-looking personage in the dogcart slowly removed a cigar he was smoking from his mouth, and answered in a good-natured husky tone, after a general glance at his questioner,—

‘Yes; do you want a lift?’

‘I should be extremely grateful if you would so favour me. I have only three-quarters of an hour to reach the station for Bristol, and as the distance is five miles, it is quite impossible for me to accomplish the task, unless—’

‘Say no more, sir,’ replied the farmer; ‘my mare will do it easily in half-an-hour. I am going close to the station, so jump up, sir.’

Lawson, without more ado, sprang into the trap, and the farmer just flicking the mare

with his whip, they rattled on at the rate of ten miles an hour.

A few general remarks ensued as to the weather and the prospects of the various crops. Lawson had placed his portmanteau at his feet, and now observed with some alarm that a small brass plate on it bore his name in full—George Lawson.

This may have been observed by various persons during the whole of his journey from town. He did not think his present companion had noticed it, but he turned the portmanteau on one side, in order that, if the farmer should at any future time be questioned, he might not have it in his power to answer as to this point.

There was no occasion for Lawson to talk, for the farmer monopolised all the conversation, and was eloquent and graphic as to the names and histories of the owners of the various country seats and mansions which were visible from the Gloucester Road. In

less than half-an-hour the trap rattled briskly over the stones of the city, and Lawson found that he should have fifteen minutes to spare.

This was his first visit to Gloucester, so he was perfectly ignorant as to the locality of the railway station. Lawson was cogitating as to the nature of the refreshment he would invite his agricultural friend to share ere they parted company, when the dogcart suddenly pulled up at a black-looking building, and the farmer beckoned two men who stood at a small doorway in the massive, heavy gates of the building; and one came and held the bridle of the mare, while the other came to the side of the conveyance on which Lawson sat.

‘This is not the railway station?’ ejaculated Lawson, in tones of wonder.

‘It is not, sir,’ replied the farmer; ‘it is her Majesty’s county gaol! and you, Mr. George Lawson, are my prisoner! Here is my war-

rant to arrest you on a charge of fraud and embezzlement. There is your name neatly engraved on your portmanteau, had I any doubt as to your identity, which I have not. No. 7 cell, Tommy.'

'All right, Mr. Woodman!'





CHAPTER XIV.

THE TRIAL.

THE galleries of the Central Criminal Court were crowded long before the hour appointed for the trial of Mr. Lawson, the well-known solicitor of the Temple. The barristers, in wig and gown, mustered in strong force, the attraction being very great to witness one of their own profession standing in the dock on a criminal charge.

Mr. Sergeant Fence was the counsel for the prosecution, and Mr. Alonzo Richards appeared for the defence. The learned sergeant was great in breach of promise cases, and generally shone to more advantage in a case for the defence. His plau-

sible manner, strong common sense, and apparent conviction of the innocence of his client, were valuable qualifications for a counsel on this side of a case. He also possessed great earnestness, and could gauge the mental calibre and peculiarities of most juries at a glance.

He never attempted too much, and by admitting certain weaknesses in his case, and which would most probably occur to the mind of an average jurymen, materially strengthened his own side of the question. When on the defence, he would with much ingenuity anticipate the probable arguments of the counsel for the prosecution, and thus discount, as it were, the speech of the counsel against him—a matter of great importance, when it is borne in mind that the prosecuting counsel has the last word. In appearance he was stout, with a handsome face, entirely devoid of hair, save a pair of very thick, black eyebrows, which he was

accustomed to move up and down in a peculiar but very expressive manner.

Mr. Richards was his junior by some twenty years, and was a brilliant living example of the falsity of the old proverb, 'That a rolling stone gathers no moss.' He had originally been in the army, then made a venture in a very different profession, and finally settled down as a disciple of Themis, after experimenting as a votary of Mars and Thespis.

His great success in his last venture was universally admitted, and his shrewdness and industry were already producing their natural results. He was much patronised by members of the criminal class, and his treatment of an opposing witness was something to remember. Possessed of a clear, distinct elocution, an eye which appeared to penetrate the very mental nature of the witness to whom he was opposed, Mr. Richards never threw away a chance, or neglected

the most trifling opportunity of making a point.

The case was to be tried by Mr. Justice Falcon, a little man, with a clean shaven, pink face, and a mild blue eye, with a manner of speaking which irresistibly reminded one of an eminent light comedian. The jury having been sworn, Mr. Justice Falcon entered the court, and took his seat on the bench, the whole of the occupants of the court rising as he did so. The judge made one little bow to the members of the bar, and another to the jury, and then George Lawson was placed in the dock. He looked very haggard and careworn, but there was an air of resolution and determination about the lines of the mouth, which betokened that he was 'equal to either fortune.'

The usual preliminaries having been gone through, Mr. Sergeant Fence rose to open the case for the prosecution. He began by stating how painful it was for him

to have the duty of bringing a criminal charge against a member of his own profession,—a profession which, whatever might be the prejudices against it, was singularly free from offences of the description mentioned in the indictment. That charge was, ‘that, on a certain date, foreign bonds, amounting in value to £20,000, according to the price of the day, had been deposited with the prisoner, who had engaged to procure a sum of £10,000 from a particular client on the security of these bonds, and pay over the said sum to Mr. Beaumont. It was admitted on all hands that the late Mr. Beaumont did actually call on the day named, about five o’clock in the afternoon. That he and the prisoner at the bar left the Temple together *en route* for the station on the Underground Railway. But from that moment Mr. Beaumont, so far as we know, was never seen alive by any human being. The circumstances of the case must

be perfectly in the recollection of every one in court, happening as they did only three years ago.'

The learned sergeant continued,—'But with the fact of the death or the disappearance of Mr. Beaumont, you, gentlemen, have nothing to do. The charge which you have to investigate is one of fraud or embezzlement. That the prisoner parted with the bonds, and which he was enabled to do as they were of the character of scrip, and passed from hand to hand without any deed of transfer or registration; and that he applied the proceeds of the sale to his own special use and benefit. We have no proof of this sale, and the fact of their having even been deposited with the prisoner, rests entirely upon the evidence of one witness, the former clerk to the prisoner. But this witness will state on oath, that he had in his possession for a short time the actual receipt of the prisoner for these bonds.

The credibility of this witness will be a point exclusively for *your* consideration, gentlemen of the jury, and I am certain his lordship will so leave it in your hands.'

'Do not take anything for granted with respect to my summing-up, brother Fence!' said the little judge, with a jocular twinkle of the eye.

'I beg pardon, my lord, I have no intention of so doing. I can assure you the case will not occupy much of your time, gentlemen, the witnesses being so few, unless, indeed, my learned friend, Mr. Richards, intends to inflict upon you a lengthy exordium in defence of the prisoner at the bar. My learned friend will probably animadvert in that peculiar style for which he is so renowned, on the very doubtful character of the chief witness for the prosecution. But I must beseech you, gentlemen, to bring to bear upon this evidence that common

sense which you exercise in the management of your own business matters, and you will clearly perceive that the witness I have mentioned has no interest or inducement to give false evidence against an employer from whom he has ever received kindness and consideration, and his evidence will receive collateral corroboration from two independent witnesses. I will not further detain you, gentlemen, but proceed to call my chief witness, James Simpson. My learned friend will probably consider that I am showing a lack of judgment in so doing. *He* would reserve such a witness to the last, bring him forward as a climax, but *I* do not care for such a *coup-de-théâtre*. *My* only object is the evolvment of *truth*, and such, gentlemen, is, I am certain, the sole purpose you have in view in discharging your duty to your country, as you are doing, by attending in the box this day.'

The learned sergeant sat down, amid a gentle murmur of satisfaction on the part of his auditors.

Mr. Simpson was then called, and mounted the steps of the witness-box. He was very nervous, and glanced keenly at Lawson in the dock, but the prisoner never raised his eyes from the mass of barristers who sat in front of him.

There is no need to recapitulate the story of the missing pocket-book, its discovery, the theft of the receipt for the bonds, and the history of Mr. Beaumont's last visit to the Temple.

Sergeant Fence had put his questions in the usual suave manner of a friendly counsel, when Mr. Richards rose to his feet, and, in a tone composed of mingled acerbity, incredulity, and contempt, proceeded to cross-examine the witness, first directing a glance towards the jury, which was intended to convey the idea,—‘Now, gentlemen, you

shall see how quickly I will scatter all this evidence to the winds.'

'May I ask, Mr. Simpson, why you did not deliver up the pocket-book immediately you found it in the wainscoting of the staircase?'

Mr. Simpson hesitated.

'Well, I don't know.'

'You don't know! But you knew a reward of twenty pounds had been offered for its recovery?'

'That offer had been withdrawn.'

'Oh! that was the reason you delayed giving it up? You were waiting to see if a renewal of the reward should take place?'

'Well, I thought I ought to get something out of it!'

'Exactly; I thought so. The interests of justice were as nothing in your eyes. *You* would have kept the book till doomsday, if you had not seen your way to getting

something out of it, as you elegantly express it.

‘What did you really get out of it?’

‘I was paid five pounds by Mr. Brown for an inspection of the book.’

‘And very good pay, too, Mr. Simpson, considering the book did not belong to you. How do you account for the loss of this wonderful receipt?’

‘I cannot account for it, except in one way.’

‘Oh, you conclude it was taken from your drawer when you were sleeping off a drunken bout. Pray, Mr. Simpson, are you in the habit of often getting drunk?’

‘Not very often.’

‘Not very often—how often? Every day?’

‘Certainly not.’

‘Every other day?’

‘Sometimes once a week, sometimes not for a month.’

‘You are quite sure you have not dreamt this fact about a receipt for the stock—that you have not evolved it from your inner consciousness?’

‘No, sir.’

‘Did Mr. Lawson not threaten you with dismissal for your intemperance?’

‘If any repetition took place.’

‘This was, I think, on the very day you saw Mr. Brown, and first told him the story of the receipt?’

‘It was ; I had told Mr. Daniel about the pocket-book before.’

‘I am not asking you about the pocket-book. That is of no consequence. I am asking you about the receipt. It was then, while you were smarting under the threat of summary dismissal, that you invented this story about the receipt.’

‘I did not invent it. Mr. Daniel can prove how upset I was when I found the receipt was missing.’

‘Ah ! were you ever a theatrical amateur, Mr. Simpson ?’

‘No ; but I’m told *you* were.’

The usual merriment ensued, as is customary, when a witness gets a laugh out of a question by counsel.

‘Don’t be impertinent, sir. I have no further questions to ask this witness, my lord.’

Mr. Simpson retired.

The evidence of Miss Beaumont was dispensed with, as the fact of the visit of her father to Lawson’s chambers on the day named was not disputed, and she was unable to give any evidence as to her father’s affairs.

The former managing clerk of Mr. Beaumont proved that he had been consulted as to the possibility of raising the sum of £10,000 on a large quantity of South American bonds ; and that no stock of this description figured among the assets when the bankruptcy took place.

Mr. Daniel Woodman was then called.

He described the two interviews with Simpson at the 'Spotted Dog,' when the pocket-book was the subject of conversation.

Mr. Richards rose to cross-examine.

'It is not necessary, I think, to inquire as to your antecedents, Mr. Woodman? You were originally chief detective officer at the Mansion House, and are now what is usually termed a private inquiry agent?'

'Yes, sir.'

'You were engaged in this case immediately after the death or disappearance of Mr. Beaumont?'

'The next day.'

'And you were unable to discover anything to elucidate the mystery?'

'I was quite unable.'

'How came you for so long a period to devote your time and talents to cultivating the friendship of Mr. Simpson?'

'I object to that question,' said Sergeant Fence.'

‘Do not answer,’ said the little judge to the witness. ‘It seems to me that the question, brother Fence, would have come with more material results had you been the propounder.’

‘Pardon me, my lord,’ said the sergeant; ‘but the answer would show our hand too much with respect to ulterior proceedings against the prisoner on a graver charge.’

‘I have no objection to telling my lord in confidence,’ said the witness.

‘Oh, for goodness’ sake! don’t tell me anything in confidence,’ said Mr. Justice Falcon, putting up his hands in horror. ‘I think, under the circumstances, the question had better be waived, Mr. Richards.’

‘As you please, my lord. You introduced yourself under a false name to this poor guileless clerk—did you not?’

‘I did.’

‘And the first intimation you had of the missing pocket-book being recovered, was

after you had drugged this poor fellow at the "Spotted Dog?"'

'I did not drug him. He drank the best Old Tom on the premises.'

'Pardon me—Mr. Woodman—I do not intend, for a moment, to disparage the quality of the liquors sold at that excellent establishment; but you know what I mean.'

Mr. Sergeant Fence interposes,—

'Does my learned friend mean to insinuate that Simpson made a false statement on that occasion? He mentioned the existence of a certain pocket-book—which is now in this court.'

'Really I must beg the learned sergeant not to insinuate that I am making insinuating remarks to this witness. I state most emphatically that the bulk of the so-called evidence was obtained from this poor clerk while in a state of intoxication, induced by the witness Woodman.'

'The existence of the receipt was not

alluded to on that occasion, Mr. Richards,' returned the judge.

'Pardon me, my lord, if I make use of the old saying—that the smaller is contained in the greater. The pocket-book was supposed, but incorrectly supposed, as probably containing some proof of the deposit of property with the prisoner, or as furnishing evidence of the nature of the business which caused the late Mr. Beaumont to call on the night in question.'

The little judge bowed in acquiescence.

After a minute's pause occupied in looking over papers, Mr. Alonzo Richards rose to address the jury for the defence.

'Gentlemen of the Jury,—My learned friend was mistaken in supposing that I have any intention of inflicting upon you "a lengthy exordium," as he elegantly described the brief statement I am about to make in the interest of the unfortunate gentleman standing at the bar. I use the

word "unfortunate" advisedly, for I am certain you will, in a very short space of time, agree with me that the prisoner has been the victim of prejudice, to an extent seldom or ever witnessed. The whole case lies in a nutshell. Before he can be found guilty of fraudulently disposing of these bonds, it is quite clear that it must be distinctly proved, and beyond the slightest possible doubt, that he was possessed of the said bonds. And this is where the prosecution fails at the very outset. The only evidence is his discarded clerk, who tells a cock-and-bull story of a receipt for the bonds having been purloined from a certain pocket-book, while he was sleeping off a drunken carouse! We all know the sanguine nature of the learned sergeant for the prosecution; but from my personal knowledge of his character, I am convinced he has not the smallest possible hope of getting

a verdict. Even if the evidence were more cogent, it would still be a case of doubt, to which, as you are well aware, the prisoner would be legally entitled to the benefit.'

To what further length the speech of the learned counsel might have extended will never be known, for at this moment an officer of the court handed a piece of paper to Sergeant Fence, who perused it in great agitation, and exclaimed,—

'My lord, I beg a thousand pardons for this irregular course; but I must call one other witness for the prosecution.'

Mr. Richards for a moment appeared as if bereft of speech, so unusual was the incident. But only for a moment, and then in his most indignant tones, exclaimed,—

'My lord, the learned sergeant demands an impossibility. He cannot call a witness after his case is closed.'

'Clearly not,' said Judge Falcon.

Sergeant Fence had now recovered his usual suave manner, and with oily accents replied,—

‘I apprehend that when your lordship glances at the name of the witness written on this piece of paper, no opposition will be offered—not even if your lordship had concluded your summing up.’

‘Let me see it, brother Fence,’ said the judge.

The paper was handed up, and Mr. Justice Falcon peered at it with his double eyeglass.

Sergeant Fence resumed,—

‘I hope your lordship will acquit me of delaying the advent of this witness till the present moment. Your lordship will not suspect *me* of a *coup-de-théâtre*!’

‘Certainly not, brother Fence; not for an instant,’ replied the judge.

‘Well, Mr. Richards, I think there is no alternative but to depart from the

usual course, and allow this witness to be called.'

'My lord—' exclaimed Mr. Richards.

But Mr. Justice Falcon waived his hand, and gave the paper to the crier, who declaimed in sonorous accents, which echoed through the court—'*James Beaumont !*'





CHAPTER XIV.

REUNION.

A PASSAGE was cleared through the crowd of bystanders, and Mr. James Beaumont slowly ascended the steps of the witness-box. The agitation of Lawson was intense. With eyes riveted upon the face of his old friend, as if he were beholding a being from the other world, he felt his knees sink beneath him, and he was compelled to cling to the front of the dock to prevent himself from falling. The opposing counsel were differently excited; the one seeing victory within his grasp, and the other certain defeat. Even the judge shared the excitement, and made a

pretence of consulting his notes, after he had given one keen penetrating glance at the unexpected witness. There was a buzz of conversation among the crowd of barristers, and in the galleries of the court, and among the jurymen in the box. Each man was asking his neighbour whether this man was *the* Mr. James Beaumont who had disappeared so strangely three years ago !

And how did Mr. Beaumont himself look and appear under the astonished gaze of the crowded court ? Very calm and sad, with his eyes mournfully fixed upon the white face and shrinking form of his old friend George Lawson, shortly to be a convicted felon in the dock of the Old Bailey ! Mr. Beaumont himself was much altered ; his figure was shrunken ; his hair had become thin and almost grey ; and his face showed signs of toil and care and exposure to hard weather. He was no longer

the sleek, rubicund, dark-haired British merchant!

The clerk of the court cried 'Silence' several times ere the learned sergeant was able to commence his brief examination.

The witness was duly sworn.

'Your name is James Beaumont?'

'It is.'

'You are the person who called at the offices of the prisoner and deposited certain stock as security for ten thousand pounds—a list of which securities I hold in my hand?'

'I am.'

The foreman of the jury here interposed, and informed the judge that if the identity of Mr. Beaumont was admitted, the case was at an end, and the verdict would be an unanimous one of guilty against the prisoner at the bar.

Mr. Justice Falcon observed there was no doubt as to the identity. That could

be certified by numerous persons in court. In fact, he, himself, had had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Beaumont in former years, and he begged to congratulate him on his return to his family and friends.

Mr. Alonzo Richards rose to say a few words,—‘Although it is not a matter which affects the question before the court, yet perhaps it may not be so pleasant for Mr. Beaumont when he learns, as he soon will do, that there is a fiat in bankruptcy hanging over his head.’

‘I hope the learned counsel will make his mind easy on that point,’ replied Mr. Beaumont. ‘I can pay thirty shillings in the pound, if necessary.’

Mr. Alonzo Richards was delighted to hear it.

The prisoner was asked if he had anything to say why sentence should not be passed upon him. Lawson had in a measure regained somewhat of his usual composure,

but his face was of an ashen hue, and his voice was weak and faltering,—

‘My Lord,—It would be useless for me now to deny that I am guilty of the crime laid to my charge in the indictment. When Mr. Beaumont deposited the stock with me on the night in question, I honestly intended to carry out my share in the transaction. I had no doubt in my own mind, on the day following, that Mr. Beaumont had lost his life by drowning in the Thames, in consequence of the fog which prevailed. I waited till a fortnight had elapsed ere I made any fraudulent use of the bonds. I was induced to do so in consequence of heavy losses on the turf. These I hoped to recover, and would then have devised some means of making restitution to the daughters of Mr. Beaumont. But ill luck and bad fortune pursued me to the bitter end! Against the disgrace of being convicted of felony, I have the satisfaction of knowing that not even

the most prejudiced of my enemies can now believe me guilty of murder! For there were some few who even suspected me of the crime of killing my friend for the sake of pecuniary advantage. I have no more to say, except to entreat Mr. Beaumont, in the memory of past and happier times, to pardon the injury I inflicted upon his daughters, and to forgive me! and to ask *you*, my lord, to temper justice with mercy!’

Mr. Justice Falcon then passed sentence as follows. His usual airy and light-comedy manner had totally disappeared, and the spectator could scarcely believe that the stern, inflexible face and severe tones of the voice belonged to the judge who had till now presided over the case as if it were an entertainment for the amusement of the spectators,—

‘George Lawson, you have been found guilty of a cowardly and dastardly crime,—that of plundering two young ladies whom you believed to be orphans, of the inheritance

which was their sole defence against poverty. And the gravity of the crime is aggravated in a moral point of view by the fact that you were on terms of friendship and intimacy both with them and their father, and occupied the responsible position of their legal adviser. Your crime is only another illustration of the fatal dangers which attend what are called turf transactions. You will be kept in penal servitude for the term of fourteen years !’

Before the spectators could turn their eyes from the judge who spoke to the prisoner who listened, Lawson had disappeared from the dock !

The court adjourned for luncheon, and Mr. Beaumont was surrounded by people who insisted on shaking hands with him, till he was rescued by Algernon Brown, who deposited him in his brougham, and then, taking his place beside him, they were driven rapidly home to Leinster Square,

where Grace and Edwin were both awaiting his return. Ethel had been telegraphed for, and was expected to arrive in the course of the day.

We will leave Mr. Beaumont surrounded by friends and happy in his return, while we briefly relate some circumstances connected with his strange disappearance. His mind had been overwrought and shaken with some fluctuations which had taken place in his business, and these nervous fears had become concentrated into one fixed idea—that he was destined to end his days in the workhouse. Continual brooding over his business anxieties had produced insomnia ; and this *effect* had become a *cause* of increased cerebral excitement. He endeavoured to banish thoughts during the waking hours of the night by following up his favourite study of astronomy ; but this only tended to diminish the amount of rest which was so indispens-

able in his peculiar condition of health. At length his reason became affected, and he deliberately planned and carried out his scheme of disappearance. When he was left by Lawson, who had returned for Mr. Beaumont's pocket-book (the same having been purposely dropped on the stairs leading to the chambers), he proceeded to the Waterloo Station and took the train for Southampton, and from thence embarked on one of the mail steamers bound for the Cape of Good Hope. Immediately on landing he made for the diamond fields—and was singularly fortunate during the first twelve months as a digger—having discovered some of the largest and most valuable specimens which had ever been found in the colony. During the remainder of his stay at the Cape he carried on the business of a diamond merchant—with such success that he was now in the possession of a very considerable fortune. As the fear

of poverty melted away, his reason gradually returned, and he decided to return to England without loss of time.

On reaching London he drove to the office of the daily journal on which Algernon Brown was engaged, and procured the address of his friend, and that done, without loss of time called at the house in Leinster Square.

By good fortune, the great Algernon was at home, and thus was enabled to sustain his wife during the shock which the very unexpected appearance of Mr. Beaumont was calculated to produce.

Algernon then telegraphed to Grace at St. John's Wood, and also to Edwin Gordon, that their presence was immediately required in Leinster Square.

On the arrival of Grace, accompanied by Gordon, Mr. Brown gently and tenderly prepared Grace for the great surprise which awaited her. But during the journey from

St. John's Wood, an unaccountable presentiment took possession of the mind of Grace, that the cause of the telegram was in some way connected with news of her father.

We must leave the reader to imagine the scene when Grace was clasped in the arms of her parent, who appeared in the similitude of one risen from the dead.

Suddenly Algernon remarked that this was the day appointed for the trial of Lawson; for Grace and Mrs. Brown had forgotten for the moment that all-absorbing event, and Algernon accordingly, with many good-humoured regrets at parting father and daughter so soon, conveyed Mr. Beaumont as speedily as possible to the Central Criminal Court, where, as the reader already knows, he arrived in time to bring the case to a sudden and, so far as justice is concerned, a satisfactory conclusion.

Mr. Ramsay and Ethel arrived during

the afternoon. Mr. Beaumont was duly introduced to his elderly son-in-law, while Ethel wept refreshing tears on her father's breast.

The characters of Grace and Ethel seemed for the moment changed ; for, whereas Grace was subdued after the first joyous outburst, and sat with one of Mr. Beaumont's hands clasped in both her own, Ethel, who had never been remarkable for any ultra display of affection on any occasion whatever, wept as if the floodgates of her very soul were loosened—but they were happy tears, and relieved the poor pent-up soul, which had had no outlet for its affection during the last two melancholy years.

Probably there were not seven happier individuals in London that night than were assembled round Algernon Brown's hospitable board in Leinster Square. Mr. Beaumont sat with a daughter on either side of him ; Gordon watching with admiration the

expression of perfect happiness which caused the features of Grace more to resemble a saint than a human being; Mr. Ramsay happy in the prospect of a *rich* father-in-law, and Brown and his wife ministering to the creature comforts of the general body.

During one of the pauses of conversation, Brown laid a small book in Mr. Beaumont's hands,—‘I do not think you are aware that your eldest daughter is an authoress. This is the sixth edition (stereotyped) of the novel “Julia,” by Grace Belmour—a *nom de plume*, Mr. Beaumont, merely.’ It was not the intention of Brown to inform his old friend that his daughters had ever been ashamed of the name of Beaumont.

Here we would fain leave them happy and reunited, but that the exigencies of our tale demand that the reader should be made acquainted with the fate of Grace, in whose fortunes the reader has, we hope, been in-

terested during her trials, her struggles, and sorrows !

There is another figure in our tale whose end remains to be told—the wretched Lawson, who had one redeeming quality—a love genuine and disinterested for the lovely Ethel Beaumont.

The morning after the trial, the following statement appeared in the daily journals :—

‘Immediately after the conviction yesterday of George Lawson for fraud and embezzlement, he was removed to the cells below. Some little delay took place before the prison clothing was brought, and when the warder entered the cell where the prisoner had been temporarily confined, he was found lifeless on the floor. The wretched man had taken a strong dose of prussic acid, the empty phial being found by his side. He had, no doubt, prepared himself with the poison, in the event of a conviction taking place.’



CHAPTER XV.

LOVE'S VICTORY.

THE summer is drawing to a close, and the cool September evenings are beginning to remind the sojourners at the various sea-side resorts that 'winter, ruler of the inverted year, is at hand.'

In front of the Hotel Imperial, at Boulogne, is seated a happy quintette. They are Mr. Beaumont and his daughter Grace, Mr. and Mrs. Algernon Brown, and Edwin Gordon, the artist. The day has been a hot one for September, and they are now luxuriating in the delicious evening breezes, which come salt-laden from the rippling ocean at their feet. The moon is slowly rising 'round and vast' above the horizon,

and beginning to illuminate the outline of the coast towards Wimille and Cape Grisnez.

Mr. Beaumont has recovered somewhat of his former robust appearance, but the hair is still grey, and the features retain their anxious, careworn expression, though the eye is brighter, and the voice has a more cheery sound, and it is more frequently heard in conversation than when he first returned a millionaire from the south of Africa.

Grace has a more placid expression in her colourless features than they have borne since the happy days at Kensington. For is not the one great trouble of her life removed? has she not her dear father by her side, happy, well, and prosperous! As Grace presses one of his horny, weather-beaten hands between her two small transparent palms, she closes her eyes, and her lips involuntarily murmur a prayer of thankfulness to God for the great blessing

which has been vouchsafed to her, and for the removal of the sorrow which lay like a darkening shadow across her future path in life.

Edwin watches with wistful eyes the face of the girl whom he loves with a devotedness not very common in this prosaic and calculating age. He has never ventured to breathe his tale of love since that evening when Grace refused him, after the little dinner at the Browns' in Leinster Square. Mr. Beaumont invited him to form one of the party during their month's holiday at Boulogne, and a very pleasant month it has turned out to be! Grace, happy with her father; Edwin counting the days of the month which remained, as a miser counts his store; and Carrie at the summit of felicity in the society of her husband, the great Algernon! who, far away from his horrid club, his literary haunts, and his newspaper office, must perforce lavish all his talents

in the way of amusing on the small circle of which he forms the brilliant centre, and of whom Carrie is the most devoted worshipper.

A servant advances from the hotel with a packet of letters, of which the lion's share falls as usual to Mr. Brown ; for the great Algernon prides himself on having correspondents, not only in all parts of England, but in almost every capital of Europe. He rapidly glances his eye over the contents of the epistles, puffing away at a large cigar meanwhile, while Grace peruses her one solitary missive, which is from her sister, Ethel Ramsay. We will glance over the shoulder of Grace, and hear the last news we are destined to hear of Ethel :—

‘MY DARLING GRACE,—I suppose by this time your holiday is coming to an end? How you must have enjoyed it! with dear papa and those lively and amusing Browns!

and so docile a cavalier as Edwin Gordon to fetch and carry for you. And then the weather has been all you could wish, and your locale the most desirable possible in that splendid hotel facing the sea. How much nicer Boulogne would be, if some good fairy or genii could swing the whole of the town round to a different point of the compass,—that is, from the south to the west.

‘I suppose you will go back to your studio on your return to town, although you have no necessity for it now, since dear papa came back to us. Even if you were to wed a certain individual, who shall be nameless, I presume you would still pursue your studies, like “two lovely berries moulded on one stem,” or rather, I should say, like Claude and Poussin.

‘You will be glad to hear that ever since dear papa came back, Mr. Ramsay has been growing more and more kind and attentive.

You will say I am becoming cynical before the cynic age, when I tell you that I partly attribute the improvement to the increased peace of mind my husband enjoys, consequent upon the dowry (post-nuptial, I suppose, it would be called) which dear papa handed over to Mr. Ramsay soon after that dreadful trial. For Mr. Ramsay has confessed to me since, that he had been very unfortunate in some city speculations he had been engaged in, and that the money given by papa has turned out a perfect godsend! And then I think there is another reason for the increased kindness on the part of Mr. Ramsay, although I hardly like to allude to it, even to *you*, my dearest sister. Since the death of Mr. Lawson, he is free from all jealous apprehensions. He would not believe me if I were to swear it on my knees, that any sympathy, or interest, or call it what you will, I ever felt for that unhappy man entirely left my

heart when I discovered that he had made away with our small patrimony, and devoted it to his own selfish ends, and left us to struggle with poverty and all its horrors in Camden Town! But I must bring this long letter to a close, with a piece of news which to me is the very best possible that could happen.

‘Mr. Ramsay has taken a small house in Kensington! Of course, he will still keep on the Grange, but I shall devote all the energies of mind and body which I may possess to weaning him away from this palace of gloom and dulness, and so induce him, in course of time, to take up his permanent abode in Kensington. I sometimes sigh when I think how different my lot might have been, but for the perfidy of Lawson! how I might have consulted the dictates of my own heart in choosing a husband; but it is useless thinking of what might have been. Anyway, I acted, as I

thought, for the best—that *you* know, my dear sister. Thank God, I have never acted selfishly. I have always thought of others before myself.

‘And now good-bye, darling; my fondest love to papa and your dear self, and best regards to the Browns and Mr. Gordon.—Your affectionate sister, ETHEL RAMSAY.’

‘What news on the Rialto?’ said Mr. Beaumont, as Brown finished reading a letter with a foreign post mark.

‘None! This is from Ouida, at Florence, thanking me for my criticism on her last. Ah! this is important—from Gambetta!’

Mr. Beaumont being a strong Conservative made no inquiries respecting *this* epistle. So he turned to Grace.

‘How is Ethel?’

‘In excellent spirits, dear papa; that is, for Ethel. And Mr. Ramsay has taken a small house near Holland Park, so we may

hope to be all together once more, as of old.'

'How can that be, dear Grace,' said Mrs. Brown, 'when you still continue to hang out (excuse the phrase) at St. John's Wood? Why not come to Kensington again?'

Grace blushed.

'Carrie, dear, it was at St. John's Wood I first achieved success, and—'

'Yes; but all your early associations are with Kensington. But see how lovely the moon is rising over Notre Dame. This is just the effect you wished to see for your new picture, Edwin. Offer your services at once, and escort your sister artist to the end of the jetty; there you will have the full effect!'

'Will you not come, dear papa?' inquired Grace.

But Mr. Beaumont made some excuse, having been duly prepared by that artful Carrie with a suitable plea. So Grace pro-

ceeded with Edwin to the head of the pier. Now, this was all part of a preconcerted plan arranged between Mr. Beaumont, Edwin Gordon, and that sly little puss, Mrs. Brown. For Mr. Beaumont wished from the bottom of his heart that Grace should marry Edwin Gordon, and firmly held the opinion that the citadel would surrender, provided the assault were made with sufficient vigour. Gordon considered the trenches had been opened on the occasion of the dinner in Leinster Square, so resolved to waste no time over preliminaries. He gently stole one arm round her waist, and pressing one hand to his lips, thus began,—

‘Grace, dear Grace,—am I doomed to sigh for ever in vain? Think how happy we should all be with your father restored to us—Ethel reunited to us.’

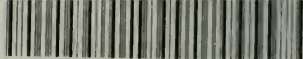
‘Ethel!’ said Grace, looking up with a sad smile, ‘always Ethel! Do you still love her?’

‘As a *sister*, as the *sister* of Grace, believe me, darling. Have I not proved that to you during these weary months of hope deferred? Your father wishes it; your friend wishes it. Am I the only man who ever loved twice? Do you not remember that Romeo loved Rosaline before he loved Juliet? And that this second love is, and will be for countless ages, the type and ensample of true love while this world endures? I only wish one little word—yes. ’Tis not a difficult word to speak. Say it for *my* sake, for *all* our sakes. May I not say, for *your* sake?’

Grace paused; and Edwin felt the fingers he held tremble within his clasp. Nothing was heard but the soft lapping of the waves against the wood-work of the pier. The whole scene was bathed in glorious moonlight. At last Grace turned her bright brown eyes upon her lover, and, over

and above the stillness which reigned around, was heard, in soft and trembling accents from her lips, one little word,—
'*Yes !*'

THE END.



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